

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG AT WORK: EXPRESSIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL  
DISSENT AS INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE

A Dissertation

by

JOHNY THOMAS GARNER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2006

Major Subject: Speech Communication

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,  
Committee Members,

Katherine I. Miller  
Charles Conrad  
Richard Street, Jr.  
Gareth Jones  
Richard Street, Jr.

Head of Department,

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## ABSTRACT

When Things Go Wrong at Work: Expressions of Organizational

Dissent as Interpersonal Influence. (May 2006)

Johny Thomas Garner, B.A., Abilene Christian University;

M.A., Abilene Christian University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Katherine I. Miller

This dissertation examines the types of messages used for organizational dissent, and argues for connections between dissent messages, choice of audience and influence goals. The organizational dissent literature has explored the situations that may trigger dissent and the variables that lead a dissenter to approach various audiences, but few studies have examined dissent messages. Additionally, this line of research has tended to neglect coworkers as a possible audience for dissent and has been characterized as atheoretical (Waldron, 1999). Much of the research on interpersonal influence has examined influence in romantic relationships, but influence may play an important role in workplace relationships as well, suggesting that interpersonal influence is an appropriate theoretical perspective from which to examine dissent. This dissertation examines the messages, audiences, and goals associated with dissent using a two-part study with interviews and surveys.

Messages differed according to audience, but, surprisingly, not according to the quality of relationship between the dissenter and the audience. Dissent expressed to supervisors is more likely to involve message types such as assertiveness, rational

arguments, solution presentation, humor, ingratiation, sanctions, threatening resignation, while dissent expressed to coworkers is more likely to involve message types such as displaying emotion or coalitions. The primary goal of expressing emotion and the secondary goal of identity were most prevalent in terms of considerations as study participants expressed dissent. The analyses indicate that the goal of expressing emotion was significantly related to messages of displaying emotion, goals of providing guidance or changing opinion were significantly more associated with solution presentation than with asking for information, the goal of gaining assistance was significantly more associated with coalitions, and the goal of relational resource was significantly less associated with messages threatening resignation. These results suggest that interpersonal influence offers a fruitful perspective from which to view dissent messages, and more research is needed to examine the goals associated with workplace influence as the goals that motivate interpersonal interactions differ from the goals that motivate organizational dissent. Additionally, these results indicate that the position of a person is more important than a relationship in determining how a person will express dissent.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

We have all experienced times when we felt frustration in an organization with policies and decisions made by those above us in the hierarchy. Mention the words dissent or grievance and almost everyone responds with “have I got a story for you.” How do individuals react when confronted with such dissatisfaction and frustration? Some people express dissent to those very same supervisors while others may turn to coworkers. Some people may attempt to vent their emotions, others may try to marshal support against policies or decisions, while others may pursue additional goals. In some cases, multiple goals may be at work in messages of dissent, whether those messages are directed toward supervisors or coworkers. Consider the employee who is upset that she was passed over for a promotion when it was given to a less qualified coworker. This employee might express her emotions to a trusted coworker, explain why she truly deserved the promotion to her supervisor, or build a coalition among other employees to undermine the less qualified person. Any of those options represent potential dissent scenarios, and messages in those scenarios could represent goals of obtaining assistance, giving direction, venting, or some combination of those and other goals.

The audience plays a role in dissent as employees choose between expressing their frustrations to supervisors, coworkers, or people outside of the organization such as family or the media. Much of organizational dissent research has attempted to determine the circumstances under which an employee would express dissent to various audiences

(e. g., Kassing, 1997). But choice of audience is not the only factor affecting the nature of dissent messages. Influence goals have been shown to affect the ways in which messages are constructed in interpersonal contexts, and organizational dissent messages are also shaped by the goals of organizational actors. This dissertation examines the nature of dissent messages and the role influence goals and workplace relationships may play in constructing those messages of dissent. I will use a two-part study comprised of qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to examine dissent, seeking to understand dissent message production and influence goals relevant for dissent, while also relating those goals to the specific messages that are used to express dissent. This dissertation will also link dissent audience to the concepts of dissent goals and dissent messages.

This chapter will review literature on dissent, workplace relationships, and interpersonal influence in order to establish the background for this study. First, the chapter will situate and define dissent in the stream of organizational resistance scholarship and review some of the research that has examined audience and triggers of dissent. That section concludes with a critique of dissent research, suggesting how this study represents extensions to the existing literature. The next section examines literature on workplace relationships focusing on supervisor-subordinate relationships and coworker communication and showing how workplace relationships affect organizational communication in general, and dissent more specifically. Finally, research on interpersonal influence is reviewed to demonstrate its appropriateness for use in organizational contexts and the significance of the influence concept in dissent situations. In particular, interpersonal influence research will be explored to further

understand the possible role of specific – and sometimes multiple – goals on the production of dissent messages.

### *Organizational Dissent*

As people with different goals and expectations interact in organizations, there are bound to be disagreements. The supervisory role in organizations often involves the imposition of imperatives from organizational decision-makers, and those imperatives may conflict with personal autonomy in the workplace. Supervisors may impose schedules and deadlines, promote and demote, and assign various other tasks that may not coincide with the wishes and hopes of subordinates, potentially pitting the employee against his or her boss. At some point, the supervisor may feel it necessary to impose sanctions on an employee, and exercising such control further restricts the autonomy of organizational members.

Critical scholars have argued for the presence of various resistance strategies in reaction to that conflict. Gottfried (1994) defined resistance as involving “actions carried out by subordinate groups...that undermine or disrupt the objectives of corresponding dominant groups” (p. 118). Resistance “could be specific actions that block the accumulation of capital (slow-downs or work stoppages) or other actions that articulate orientations contrary to hegemonic ones (e.g. symbolic). These actions are expressions of workers’ ‘normal’ conduct, regardless of solidaristic conditions” (p. 118). Huspek (1993) argued for dueling structures of meaning, oppositional and interdependent, that express domination and resistance, providing a choice of one set of meanings over another. Scott (1990) observed a difference between the public and

private lives of workers, their actions in front of supervisors and their behaviors when managers “aren’t looking.” He went on to label this private behavior as hidden transcripts, where workers express their frustrations to themselves or to coworkers. A place where public and private transcripts may overlap could involve expressing disagreement as employees choose when, where, and to whom to voice frustrations.

### *The Dissent Decision*

One form of resistance is openly expressing disagreement with managerial decisions (Kassing, 1998), and organizational communication scholars have argued that such expressions are important for the organization’s success as well as for the individual’s job satisfaction (Hegstrom, 1990; Redding, 1985; Stanley, 1981). There are several important factors that may lead an employee to express dissent, and Graham (1986) argues that employees typically go through several steps before deciding to dissent. In Graham’s model, the first stage is awareness of the issue. Following this level of awareness, organizational members deliberate on the perceived seriousness of the issue, attribute personal responsibility for responding, and calculate the feasibility of a response. Decisions about these aspects of the issue could lead to a decision to respond to the issue, that is, to dissent. This decision to dissent will typically involve a consideration of the magnitude of behavioral response as well as the perceived organizational response to the dissent act.

But other factors may also relate to the decision to dissent. Morrison and Phelps (1999) studied “taking charge,” which they presented as attempts to improve the organization or work processes in order to benefit the organization, similar to dissent.

Morrison and Phelps found that taking charge was more common when employees felt supervisors were open to feedback and when employees felt higher levels of self-efficacy and responsibility. This suggests that employees may be more likely to express dissent when they feel their supervisor is open to feedback and when they feel their consent could have an effect on the situation. Other researchers have also noted that receptivity is a central reason why some people express dissent (Hegstrom, 1999; Sprague & Ruud, 1988). One of the earliest theories to address the conflict between personal autonomy and organizational decision-making that is central in many conceptualizations of dissent is Hirschman's (1970) theory of exit-voice-loyalty. Hirschman presented exit and voice as the two options available to employees or customers of an organization as they experience dissatisfaction with that organization. Those employees/customers can either "exit" (leave the organization) or "voice" dissatisfaction with the condition of the organization. According to Hirschman, an employee's decision to choose exit or voice will depend upon that employee's loyalty to the organization, where higher loyalty would lead one to choose voice over exit.

Numerous studies have contested and advanced Hirschman's model. Extending Hirschman's model, Spencer (1986) argued that studies have successfully applied the exit-voice-loyalty model to the situation of employee dissatisfaction in addition to Hirschman's original concept of customer reactions. Spencer found support for Hirschman's model in that the number of voice mechanisms in an organization were negatively correlated with turnover intentions. That is, the more opportunities employees perceived to express voice, the less likely they were to exit. But do loyal

employees always give voice to frustrations? That may be the case when exit or voice are the only two choices, but Boroff and Lewin (1997) challenged this dualism. Boroff and Lewin found that loyalty is often equated with “suffering in silence” (p. 60), a situation in which employees choose to live with the status quo and not rock the boat, neither voicing dissent nor exiting the organization. Farrell (1983) also challenged the idea that voice and loyalty were the only options. Some employees may choose to reduce the amount of effort they give to the organization, putting in enough effort to avoid serious sanctions or termination, but also “dragging their feet” in ways that impede organizational success, similarly to Fredrick Taylor’s “soldiering” response. Farrell labeled such behavior “neglect.”

Following this addition of “neglect” to the “exit, voice, loyalty” model, Farrell (1983) and Rusbult and Lowery (1985) characterized these four possible reactions in terms of the extent to which the reactions are active versus passive and constructive versus destructive. In this model, voice is seen as active and constructive, exit as active and destructive, and neglect as passive and destructive. However, it is also possible for employees to use voice for purposes of improving organizations or for less constructive objectives. Hagedoorn, van Yperen, van de Vliert, and Buunk (1999) captured this distinction in a model in which voice was divided into considerate voice and aggressive voice. Based on this reconceptualization, considerate voice is seen as active and constructive while aggressive voice is seen as active and destructive. In another extension, Gorden (1988) used dimensions of active/passive and constructive/destructive to consider the range of employee voice. Gorden identified specific dissent strategies



such as “principled dissent” and “making suggestions” as active constructive voice, strategies such as “antagonistic exit” and “complaining to coworkers” as active destructive voice, strategies such as “quiet nonverbal support” and “unobtrusive compliance” as passive constructive voice, and strategies such as “calculative silence” and “psychic withdrawal” as passive destructive voice.

Most of these discussions of exit-voice-loyalty-neglect conceive of voice and exit as opposing choices with dissent being part of voice. But Kassing (1997) argued that dissent is inherent in exit and neglect strategies as well. Further, Kassing suggested that employees may use combinations of voice, exit, and neglect in response to dissatisfaction in the workplace rather than depending on one choice in isolation. This suggests that dissent may be an ongoing element of organizational life. But in order to study such a phenomenon as dissent, it is important to clarify exactly what is and what is not dissent.

### *Defining Dissent*

Dissent can be seen as one of the central concerns of organizational communication scholars because of the importance of rhetorical freedom in the workplace (Hegstrom, 1990). Hegstrom (1995) defined dissent as “constructive feedback from employees and customers” and argued that organizational dissenters could be identified by asking employees, “who is not afraid to disagree in the organization” (p. 84-85). Though Hegstrom included customers as dissenters in his definition, other studies focus only on employees. Kassing (1997) argued that dissent was not only open disagreement but also a failing to accept organizational decision-

making premises. In this conceptualization of dissent, employees first feel alone within the organization and then express contradictory opinions and disagreements to counter that isolation. Kassing (2002) defined dissent as “a particular form of employee voice that involves the expression of disagreement or contradictory opinions about organizational practices and policies” (p. 189).

This dissertation, modifying Kassing’s conceptualization, defines dissent as *the informal expression to another person or persons of disagreement with organizational policies or with a supervisor*. Dissent includes what Graham (1986) referred to as “principled dissent,” in which an individual attempts to dispute or transform organizational norms for reasons of justice, honesty, or economy. By classifying certain expressions as “principled dissent,” there obviously are other expressions that would not be based on such principles. Hegstrom (1999) compared principled dissent to what he called “personal advantage dissent,” where the employee was working to improve his or her own situation. Hegstrom argued that Graham’s principled dissent left out instances where personal advantage and principles run parallel with each other. This dissertation looks at both principled and personal advantage dissent.

This definition emphasizes the social nature of dissent in that it includes messages expressed to others, but not frustrations expressed to oneself or muttered to no one in particular. Several authors have examined the social nature of dissent, arguing that dissent is a phenomenon experienced between organizational members rather than in seclusion. Hegstrom (1999) collected data by asking employees which coworkers were most likely to express dissent, and Redding (1985) argued that dissent was perceptual,

“existing in the eyes of the beholders” (p. 246), both of which suggest that dissent is experienced in interactions rather than isolation. Kassing (2001) found support for his ideas of dissent and audience, which were based primarily of self-report data, by examining the perceptions other organizational members hold of dissenters. The fact that Kassing saw differences in dissenters based on the perceptions of other organizational members also indicates that dissent is experienced in interactions with other people in organizations rather than alone in isolation. Dissent messages shape and are shaped by the larger social interactions that occur among organizational members.

The definition of dissent stated above also indicates that this investigation of dissent messages will consider “informal” communication rather than formal grievance procedures. Some authors have included grievance systems within their conceptualizations of dissent, as Boroff and Lewin (1997) defined voice in terms frequency of grievance filing, and Spencer (1986) examined voice mechanisms and included grievance systems. However, other work in dissent (Hegstrom, 1999; Kassing, 1997, 1998, 2002), particularly in the communication literature, does not include formal grievance systems, perhaps because formal grievance procedures limit an employee’s choice when it comes to the audience for dissent and specific messages formulated in the dissent process. Because communication literature has not typically included formal grievance mechanisms in investigations of dissent, this dissertation focuses on more informal interactions.

After defining dissent, three questions are important for understanding dissent as well as understanding the direction of this dissertation. First, what is actually said when

individuals choose to dissent in the organizational context? Understanding the message of dissent, what is expressed by the employee, is of primary importance and must be considered before other concepts can be explored. Second, it is important to understand a little more about the audience of dissent messages. That is, to whom do employees express their frustrations with work? Finally, the third question concerns events that cause, or trigger, dissent expressions. The next sections elaborate on research that has examined dissent messages, audiences, and triggers to provide a frame for the study to follow.

### *Dissent Messages*

Central to understanding organizational dissent is examining the messages of dissenters. As people express frustrations with their work environment, what do they say? Several researchers have considered the importance of messages to exploring the nature of workplace dissent (Hegstrom, 1999; Kassing, 2002). Hegstrom (1999) asked respondents to recall the details of the dissent experience, collecting narratives of people dissenting and then studying their motivations for choosing to dissent. Kassing (2002) focused more fully on examining the messages themselves and categorized five strategies for upward dissent expressed to supervisors: direct-factual appeal, repetition, solution presentation, circumvention, and threatening-resignation. In a more general study, Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980) studied organizational influence and found eight tactics in messages of such influence attempts: assertiveness, ingratiation, rationality, sanctions, exchange, upward appeals, blocking, and coalitions. It is quite possible that these more general influence tactics are implicit in the more specific

messages of dissent. For example, dissent expressed to supervisors could be couched in terms of ingratiation or could be framed more as assertiveness. Dissent to coworkers could be messages offering an exchange of favors or more as coalition-building. There are also obvious parallels between Kipnis' et al. tactics and Kassing's strategies. Direct-factual appeal is similar to rational arguments, and circumvention parallels upward appeal. Threatening resignation may be only a stronger version of blocking, while repetition could obviously involve repeating any of these tactics. Messages are an important part of organizational communication as a whole, and certainly understanding organizational dissent messages is a key to understanding organizational dissent. However, few studies have explored messages directly and the arena of dissent messages remains relatively understudied, particularly when compared with the amount of research on other issues such as audiences and triggers of dissent.

### *Audience*

Implied by the definition stated earlier, messages need not be expressed to a particular audience to be considered dissent, and, in fact, several potential audiences emerge when considering the extant research on dissent in organizations. Audience is an important consideration because dissent cannot happen in a vacuum, and the audience confirms the relational nature of dissent. Kassing (1998) identified three audiences of dissent—management and supervisors (which he labeled as upward dissent), coworkers (lateral dissent), and friends and family external to the organization (displaced dissent). Upward dissent is similar to previous conceptualizations of voice in organizations (Gorden, 1988; Hegstrom, 1999; Kassing, 1997; Spencer, 1986), upward influence

(Krone, 1992; Waldron, 1999) as well as work on boatrocking (Redding, 1985; Sprague & Ruud, 1988) where employees express dissent to supervisors. For example, if a supervisor makes a decision that negatively affects an employee and that employee mentions the problem to the supervisor, that would be upward dissent. On the other hand, lateral dissent is also an outlet for dissent as employees express dissent messages to coworkers, perhaps fearing that upward dissent might bring retribution from a supervisor (Kassing, 1998). This expression of resistance to coworkers bears similarity to Sotirin and Gottfried's (1999) study of secretarial bitching and Scott's (1990) concept of hidden transcripts. These messages would include venting to coworkers, building coalitions against particular decisions or managers, and working to change the workplace through coworkers. Finally, much of the research on dissent examines whistleblowing (Dozier & Miceli, 1985; Elliston, 1982; Gorden, 1988; Westin, 1986), which suggests an audience for dissent messages outside the traditional boundaries of the organization. Kassing defined displaced dissent as messages expressed to an external audience such as family members or friends. Although Kassing (1997) attempted to establish displaced dissent as separate from whistleblowing, the two are certainly related as both involve messages expressing workplace frustrations to audiences not typically associated with the organization. Many of Kassing's early studies failed to find high levels of support for the concept of displaced dissent in the sense that dissent expressed to friends and family could not be explained by most of the hypothesized factors that predicted other forms of dissent (Kassing, 2000a; Kassing & Avtgis, 1999). However, Kassing later argued that displaced dissent was negatively

related to age and organizational tenure and was more frequent among nonmanagement personnel (Kassing & DiCioccio, 2004).

Several factors seem to influence organizational members as they choose an audience for dissent messages and Kassing's work has been most extensive in exploring these factors. For example, Kassing (2000a) found that a high quality relationship with one's supervisor led to more upward dissent (directed to supervisors), while lower quality supervisor relationships would lead to more lateral dissent (directed to coworkers). Kassing also found relationships between dissent audience and organizational variables such as workplace freedom of speech, organizational identification (2000b), argumentativeness, verbal aggression, organizational position (management versus non-management) (Kassing & Armstrong, 2001; Kassing & Avtgis, 1999), perceived locus of control (Kassing & Avtgis, 2001), job tenure, employment history, and organizational history (Kassing & Armstrong, 2001). Clearly, there has been a great deal of work examining what factors may affect how a dissenter chooses an audience though no work has examined any potential interactions between message and audience. That is, research has investigated to whom an individual might talk, but has not considered the influence of audience choice on what is expressed in dissent.

### *Triggers*

Beyond considering messages and audiences, it is also important to consider what may prompt employees to dissent. Previous research has argued that every organization could potentially present situations that were not serious enough for public scandal, but that may be "objectionable to workers" (Sprague & Ruud, 1988, p.177).

Redding (1985) listed a continuum of options ranging from clearly illegal actions (e.g., seeing another employee stealing from a cash register) to incidents that are “irritating or annoying,” (e.g., personality clashes) any of which could produce dissent. Other triggers could include role conflicts, sexual harassment, loss of workplace benefits (or increase of costs), and issues of principle such as another employee stealing from the company (Graham, 1985; Hegstrom, 1999; Kassing & Armstrong, 2002; Sprague & Ruud, 1988). . Obviously, none of these situations would trigger dissent in everyone, and no evidence has been presented that argues one trigger will produce a different type of dissent than another. Thus the label dissent trigger indicates an event or issue that may be likely to cause dissatisfaction in an employee and provoke that employee to express that dissatisfaction.

#### *Criticism of Dissent Research*

Previous research has examined several aspects of the dissent process. Researchers have examined what may trigger dissent, a worker’s decision to dissent, and the audience to whom that worker is likely to express dissent. But despite those understandings, there are still issues that remain unexplored and problematic. Specifically, research on dissent has been largely atheoretical, inattentive to content of messages, and overly concentrated on upward dissent. These critiques will be discussed in turn.

*Atheoretical research.* Waldron (1999) reviewed literature on upward influence and noted its similarity to research regarding the dissent process. In the studies he reviewed, Waldron noted that many could be criticized as atheoretical categorizations



and argued that to advance upward influence knowledge “rather than construct comprehensive taxonomies, researchers would classify messages along dimensions posited to be important in a theory of persuasion” (p. 264, but see Krone, 1992, for an exception). What seems to be missing is any way to connect dissent messages to other communication constructs such as audience or to other organizational constructs such as position or status. Hegstrom (1995) argued that “the absence of communication constructs from a predictive model of dissent seems counter-intuitive” (p. 89). Indeed, all of the above work seems to be vulnerable to the criticism of being atheoretical, which limits this research from being able to make more definitive claims about dissent. Instead, scholars are constrained to explaining one situation at a time, rather than abstracting that knowledge to make sense of patterned interactions in organizations. A more theoretical consideration of dissent would allow scholars to move beyond snapshots of the dissent process to a consideration of dissent across situations, enabling researchers to make theoretically-driven predictions about dissent and extending organizational communication scholarship to a more complete understanding of influence in the workplace. Such a perspective would incorporate communication constructs, as organizational members express their frustrations to others, and place messages at the heart of any dissent research.

*Little attention to message.* A second criticism that could be leveled at much of the research on dissent is that researchers have typically paid little attention to the message itself (Hegstrom, 1995, but see Hegstrom, 1999, as an exception). Scholars studying dissent have focused primarily on events that trigger dissent (Kassing &

Armstrong, 2002; Sprague & Ruud, 1988), the audience to whom dissent is expressed (Kassing, 1997, 1998), or organizational factors influencing dissent messages (Kassing, 2000b, Kassing & Armstrong, 2001). Kassing (1997) suggested that he was examining dissent expressions, but then became more focused on the audience rather than the message. A potential exception, Kassing (2002), studied the tactics of upward dissent and concluded that upward dissent strategies would vary in terms of overt versus covert and relational versus contextual focus. Yet few others have followed this line of inquiry to examine the messages expressed in dissent, despite their importance in organizational life (Gorden & Infante, 1991; Waldron, 1999). Redding (1972) and others (Buzzanell & Stohl, 1999; Stohl & Redding, 1987) have argued that the message is the core of communication; indeed, Stohl and Redding (1987) called the message the “fulcrum” of research in organizational communication. Scholars have focused on audience, triggers, and sometimes decisions to dissent, but have stopped short by not looking at messages of dissent.

*Neglect of coworker audience.* Finally, most of the attention in dissent research has neglected lateral dissent, focusing primarily on upward dissent. Krone (1992) and Waldron (1999) centered exclusively on dissent to supervisors in looking at upward influence. Sprague and Ruud (1988) argued that most dissent would be expressed to supervisors and hence ignored other possible audiences. Hegstrom (1999) examined messages of dissent expressed in employees’ narratives, but nearly all of the stories he explored focused exclusively on upward dissent. Kassing’s work has examined multiple audiences, but his in-depth look at tactics (2002) considered only those messages

expressed to supervisors. However, Krone (1992) found that employees who felt distanced from supervisors would attempt upward influence less, which seems to open the door for lateral dissent. Additional research has examined whistleblowing (Dozier & Miceli, 1985; Elliston, 1982; Gorden, 1988; Westin, 1986), which could be considered a sub-category of displaced dissent. Scholars within various traditions have examined dissent to supervisors and certain outside audiences, but those foci are not the complete picture. Research on organizational dissent has traditionally neglected the important role that coworker relationships play in organizational life (Teboul & Cole, 2005). Sotirin and Gottfried (1999) studied “secretarial bitching,” dissent expressed between secretaries, and argued how such dissent might serve as both a liberating release as well as a constraint on further action. But for many people, discussions of workplace frustrations may occur more frequently with coworkers than with any other audience, and so it seems that the coworker audience should be highlighted in organizational dissent along side of supervisors and external audiences.

While the first of these three critiques, the atheoretical nature of most organizational dissent research, is discussed later, the first research question specifically addresses the second and third criticisms by addressing dissent messages to both supervisor and coworker audiences. This research question asks about the messages themselves as well as attributes that may underlie such messages.

**RQ1:** What message attributes characterize dissent messages sent to supervisors and coworkers?

*Summary of Dissent Section*

In order to advance our knowledge of organizational dissent and give earlier work a theoretical focus that centers on messages as well as multiple audiences, there needs to be a new way to understand dissent. Dissent messages entail instrumental, relational, identity and potentially other goals (Waldron, 1999, p. 271), which suggests that literature on influence goals might provide a helpful theoretical frame for understanding the process through which dissent is expressed in the workplace. Further, conceptualizing dissent as interpersonal interaction within an organizational context can highlight the relationships between an employee and his or her coworkers and between an employee and a supervisor. This conceptualization enables research on influence and compliance-gaining to serve as foundation to better understand organizational dissent messages, messages both to supervisors and to coworkers. Before framing dissent as influence, however, it is important to first better understand workplace relationships and how those relationships affect workplace messages. The next section of the literature review emphasizes the nature of supervisor-subordinate and coworker relationships in organizations, suggesting that such interpersonal relationships have a profound effect on the ways in which we experience organizational life. This section on workplace relationships serves as the warrant to allow interpersonal influence literature to inform the present investigation of organizational dissent, a first step toward answering the earlier critique that dissent research is atheoretical. This next section on workplace relationships also emphasizes coworker audiences in dissent, noting that employees develop relationships with both supervisors and coworkers.

### *Workplace Relationships*

For interpersonal influence literature to be relevant to dissent in organizations, several things need to be established first. One of the most significant assumptions of such a conceptual leap is that workplace relationships matter in an interpersonal sense. Based on the time that many people spend in a workplace environment, it seems reasonable to assume that workplace relationships are important to organizational members. Research has argued that such relationships influence work experience and organizational effectiveness (Sias, Heath, Perry, Silva, & Fix, 2004; Sias, Krone, & Jablin, 2002) and various researchers have argued that one of the most important parts of organizational life are the connections that we form with others in the workplace (Sandelands & Boudens, 2000; Waldron, 2000). Sandelands and Boudens (2000) noted that “people are not concerned to be all they can be on the job...it’s the connection to others” (p. 49). Waldron (2000) stated that “it is the nature of work relationships, not the nature of the task itself, that creates the highest potential for intense emotional experience” (p. 66). Often, the relationships between people can serve as social support to buffer the experience of stress brought on by work events (Patterson, 2003). Two of the more important types of connections associated with work are the relationship workers develop with a supervisor and the relationship workers develop with coworkers. This study focuses on these two relationships though others (subordinate, competitor, supplier, distributor, etc.) are certainly a part of the constellation of workplace relationships.

### *Superior-subordinate Relationships*

One relationship that greatly influences the work environment is the connection between a worker and a supervisor. Jablin (1979), in an early review of supervisor-subordinate relationships, defined communication in such relationships as “exchanges of information and influence between organizational members, at least one of whom has formal...authority” (p. 1202). This definition emphasizes organizational status as one factor that separates these relationships from other interpersonal dyads. Jablin argued that a critical aspect of the communication between supervisors and subordinates is feedback, and he summarized a number of studies in this area, finding that (a) positive feedback from subordinates is more effective than negative feedback in initiating changes in supervisor behavior, (b) supervisors prefer compliant subordinates, but not those who are overly ingratiating, and (c) supervisor behavior may change, but subordinates’ perceptions tend to change more slowly.

Jablin (1979) also noted research in supervisor-subordinate communication indicating that those relationships are not static, either across time or across specific supervisor-subordinate relationships. In the several decades since Jablin’s review of supervisor-subordinate communication, this critical point about the nature of these relationships has driven much of the research regarding supervisor-subordinate interaction, particularly in the development of leader-member exchange theory (LMX). Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) discussed developments in LMX, noting that one of the earliest conceptualizations of leader-follower relations involved a distinction between a leader’s “in-group” and his or her “out-group.” In contrast to traditional leadership

theories that consider the “average leadership style” of supervisors, leader-member exchange theory proposes the development of leadership within the framework of dyadic relationships. Indeed, leader-member exchange theory (LMX) was originally termed “vertical dyadic linkage” theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). From this perspective, a supervisor builds relationships with subordinates, but some of those relationships are closer while others are more distant. The closer relationships, that supervisor’s in-group, are characterized by higher quality communication with increased intimacy, trust, and commitment (Fairhurst, 2001).

Leader-member exchange is an important perspective from which to understand organizational dissent in that the quality of relationship an employee has with a supervisor makes a difference in whether or not that employee expresses dissent to that supervisor (Kassing, 2000a), and it seems likely that the quality of relationship will also affect the content of messages of dissent, particularly in supervisor-subordinate interactions. Sias et al. (2002) reviewed literature on LMX and communicative behavior and observed that communication practices may vary based on relationships between superiors and subordinates as in-group members tend to be more “communicatively engaged” with supervisors. Krone (1992) argued that in-group members might express more upward influence and do so more openly because they feel free to do so. Other researchers (notably Kramer, 1995) have found support for a model of LMX with three levels of relationship quality, including a “medium” level of relationship. This is important because there are certainly supervisor-subordinate relationships in which the

two may have developed intimacy, trust, and commitment, but in which relational closeness may ebb and flow depending on the issue or situation.

With the variations in relational closeness to supervisors, it is likely that there will also be variation in dissent messages. Kassing (2000a) related LMX to an employee's choice of audience, suggesting that in-group members are more likely to express dissent to supervisors and out-group members are more likely to express dissent to coworkers. But no research has examined whether relational quality will make a difference in the message itself when a worker expresses dissent to supervisors. The second research question explores this issue, asking whether some types of messages are more frequently expressed to a supervisor with whom the worker is close and other types of messages are expressed more frequently to more distant supervisors.

**RQ2:** How does the quality of relationship between supervisor and subordinate influence the nature of dissent messages?

### *Coworker Relationships*

In some cases, approaching a supervisor to express dissent may be the easiest way to address the problem at hand, but at other times, expressing dissent to a supervisor may not be seen as feasible or may not be desired by the dissatisfied employee. Sias and Jablin (1995) extended the idea of workplace relationships to include coworker relations as well as superior-subordinate relationships, showing how supervisor-subordinate relationships may also affect coworker relationships and coworker communication. Sias (1996) examined how coworkers socially constructed their perceptions of each other through talking about relationships and found that “by sharing opinions and attributions



regarding the topic of discussion, they worked toward a consensual understanding of their environment” (p. 182). Although Sias was studying favoritism in the workplace, these concepts could also be applied to dissent messages as employees share messages of dissent laterally to construct perceptions of what is worthy of resistance and what is worthy of compliance in the workplace. Other research has specifically indicated that the type of relationship an employee has with a supervisor affects peer relationships in the workplace. (Kramer, 1995; Sias & Cahill, 1998; Sias, Krone & Jablin, 2002). When dissent to supervisors is not an option, employees may then turn to coworkers to vent, form coalitions, or test the validity of their claim. Because of this, coworker relationships are important for understanding organizations in general and dissent specifically.

Of course, relationships with coworkers can vary, some being closer while other may be more distant. Kram and Isabella (1985) studied how people formed relationships with coworkers in place of mentor relationships, finding three types of coworker relationships: information peers, collegial peers, and special peers. Information peers functioned primarily for the sharing of workplace knowledge, collegial peers provided career strategizing, job-related feedback, and friendship, and special peers were useful for confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendship. Other research has related various factors such as supervisor consideration, cohesion, autonomy, and pressure to these types of peer relationships, finding that high cohesion promoted higher rates of collegial and special peers and lower numbers of information peers and high

perceived pressure and high supervisor consideration were negatively related to occurrences of special peers (Odden and Sias, 1997).

Sherony and Green (2002) synthesized work on peer relationships and LMX and argued that coworkers' relationship with a common leader could be used to predict those coworker exchange (CWX) quality, following Heider's balance theory and values of respect, trust, and commitment. That hypothesis was supported in that coworkers who were each close with a common leader were also closer to each other. Additionally, diversity in CWX was negatively related to organizational commitment so that if an organizational member experiences some low quality relationships with coworkers and some high quality relationships, that coworker may be less committed than those who have either high or low quality coworker exchanges.

Whether between supervisors and subordinates or coworkers, workplace relationships are important to understand because they affect organizations and organizational communication. Barry and Crant (2000) studied dyadic relationships in organizations and argued that message properties, temporal message patterns, and relational perceptions are related to what they called "interactional richness," where richer relationships are characterized by efficient, coordinated, and accurate communication (p. 651). What makes these relationships important is their occurrence in an organizational context where characteristics such as hierarchy, structure, and culture mediate the affects of message properties, message patterns, and interpersonal attributions (Barry & Crant, 2000). Those relationships can also affect organizations by giving the organization access to more or better information, providing employees with

work-related assistance and technological support, and improving workplace climate (Bridge & Baxter, 1992).

The preceding literature indicates that coworker relationships are important in organizations and that such relationships may vary as employees are closer to some organizational members and more distant from others. But as stated earlier, the coworker audience in general has been neglected, and no research has examined how the quality of coworker relationships relates to dissent message. Given the importance of audience to dissent (Kassing, 1997), it stands to reason that relational quality may have a significant effect on dissent messages. The following research question address the potential consequences of coworker relationships on dissent messages, comparing the quality of those relationships with the messages expressed to coworkers.

**RQ3:** How does the quality of relationships between coworkers affect the nature of dissent messages?

### *Interpersonal Influence*

Given the importance of workplace relationship on organizational interaction, it stands to reason that some of the conceptualizations in interpersonal communication literature could be applied in organizational settings to advance what we know about organizational communication. Framing dissent from an interpersonal communication lens also addresses Waldron's critique that too much of this work has been atheoretical (1999) and Hegstrom's (1995) call for a consideration of social influence literature in dissent research. The question then remains as to whether it is appropriate to view dissent messages as acts of influence. Scholars have noted the similarity between

dissent and influence, particularly in cases in which the dissent is expressed to supervisors (Waldron, 1999). Dillard, Anderson, and Knobloch (2002) defined interpersonal influence as “symbolic efforts designed (a) to preserve or change the behavior of another individual or (b) to maintain or modify aspects of another individual that are proximal to behavior, such as cognitions, emotions, and identities” (p. 426). When we express dissent to a supervisor, we may be trying to make him or her aware of the situation (modifying cognitions), attempting to have him or her change the triggering situation (change the behavior of another individual), arousing pity without arousing anger (maintaining/modifying emotions), or a host of similar goals that fit that definition of influence.

The argument could be made, however, that lateral and displaced dissent are not about social influence, but simply about expressing frustrations, “venting” to others. This study does not dispute the potential cathartic effects of dissent, but certainly there are times when expressing frustrations to coworkers and external audiences involves more than just release, when employees are looking to build relationships and marshal support for a dissent position. Additionally, even in times of venting, attempting to obtain emotional or social support can be considered influence. Previous communication research has argued that all communication is built on purposeful goals (Berger, 2002; Dillard et al., 2002; Kellermann, 1992, 2004), and even in times of expressing frustrations to coworkers, dissent messages are built upon goals, one of which could be to vent emotions to others. Additionally, researchers have argued that maintaining relationships in organizations may be an important goal in and of itself

(Waldron, 1991; Waldron & Hunt, 1992). This study proceeds from the perspective that, whether to supervisors, coworkers, or external audiences, dissent can be usefully conceptualized as a social influence process.

### *Influence and Organizations*

Interpersonal influence as a theoretical frame involves examining messages in light of the goals of interactants and assumes that social influence behaviors are usually associated with influence goals. The majority of the research regarding influence behaviors and goals has been conducted in romantic encounters (i.e., Dillard, 1989), but some researchers have examined interpersonal influence within organizational contexts (Kipnis et al., 1980; Krone, 1992; Krone & Ludlum, 1990). Kipnis et al. (1980) studied influence specifically in organizations and found a relationship between the frequency of each of the organizational influence tactics in their proposed typology, such as assertiveness or ingratiation, and several factors including influence goal. For example, Kipnis et al. found that people who want to convince someone to accept new ideas are most likely to use rational arguments (p. 450). Krone and Ludlum stated that subordinates concerned with personal benefit goals were more likely to use politeness tactics than those pursuing organizational goals. This finding is similar to the distinction between Graham's (1986) principled dissent and Hegstrom's (1999) personal advantage dissent. Krone (1992) pursued slightly different lines, arguing that upward influence in organizations could be seen along two dimensions: explicit/implicit outcomes and explicit/implicit means of achieving those outcomes, and certainly dissent could be construed in such terms, where upward dissent might be more explicit and lateral dissent

might be more implicit. Waldron (1991) examined goal-directed relationship maintenance messages in organizations, finding four categories of such messages: direct, contractual, personal, and regulative. Though the specific findings from these studies are not always consistent, this line of research illustrates the importance of goals and some of the various organizational factors that serve to constrain and/or reproduce those goals. The next section traces some of the thinking regarding influence goals before examining potential obstacles to them.

### *Influence Goals*

The issue of goals is an important one in dissent as well as interpersonal influence literature. In considering upward influence within the organizational context, Waldron (1999) noted, “nearly all of the empirical work conceptualizes upward influence (if only implicitly) as a deliberate attempt...to select tactics that will bring about change...and facilitate achievement of a personal or organizational objective” (p. 253). Dillard (1989) defined an influence goal as “the motivations underlying attempts to produce behavior change in a target person” (p. 294). As we communicate, we do so with an objective, whether to strengthen relationships with coworkers, build an alliance against an overbearing supervisor, or experience a cathartic release of emotions. Stiff and Mongeau (2003) reviewed several major communication theories involving influence goals, such as Dillard’s Goals, Plans, Action Model (Dillard, 1989; 1990a) and Berger’s Theory of Planning (Berger, 1997). These theories provide general frameworks considering the ways in which goals influence the development of plans, and specific messages and tactics are seen as following from these goals and plans.

Several research programs have contributed to a variety of typologies of goals. Kellermann (2004) reviewed several research programs that reported compliance gaining goals (Cody, Canary, & Smith, 1994; Dillard, 1990b; Rule & Bisanz, 1987) and argued for a compilation of thirteen influence goals: provide guidance, get advice, obtain favor, obtain information, share time together, initiate relationship, move relationship forward, end relationship, get date, obtain permission, change opinion, fulfill obligation, and stop annoying habit (Kellermann, 2004, p. 407). These goals are important in considering very specific issues involved in influence goals, but other scholars have argued for a more abstract consideration of the influence goal construct. Models developed by these scholars typically consider multiple goals of interactants and specify a distinction between two levels of goals – primary and secondary (Dillard, Segrin, & Harden, 1989; Meyer, 2002; Waldron, 1991). In this model, Kellerman’s influence goals would be considered “primary” goals (e.g., what does the interactant want to accomplish in the influence attempt). In contrast, secondary goals include identity goals of self-concept, interaction goals such as social appropriateness, personal resource goals, relational resource goals, and arousal management goals (Dillard, et al., 1989). Dillard et al. argued that primary goals initiate and maintain social interaction, while secondary goals create boundaries, and identify verbal choices available to interactants. Put another way, primary goals drive interactions while secondary goals “act as a counterforce to [the influence episode] and as a set of dynamics that help to shape planning and message output” (Dillard, 1990a, p. 46). Meyer (2002) found that secondary goals were particularly vulnerable to context, suggesting that the organizational environment may

constrain such goals as facework and relational concerns. Krone and Ludlum (1990) argued that placing an interpersonal dyad in an organizational setting might highlight the presence of multiple goals, saying

At a minimum, each organizational member acts to establish, maintain, and occasionally relinquish a variety of relationships at work, to manage multiple role identities (e.g., formal roles and occupational roles), and to accomplish work-related tasks. ...Within organizational contexts, individual goals are embedded in, and may conflict with, or be constrained by, work group and organizational goals. (p. 138)

As a person begins an interaction, it is conceivable that he or she could be motivated by one primary goal and one secondary goal, or almost any number of each. In an organizational setting, that person is potentially embedded in organizational objectives and the workplace context, which may highlight the presence of various goals, particularly those that contradict each other. Organizations may also be a fruitful arena in which to study how people construct messages in response to perceived obstacles to their goals. The next section discusses obstacles and influence goals in more detail.

### *Obstacles to Goals*

Despite the goals with which people approach an influence attempt, things may proceed differently from the ways in which we plan. Berger and Kellermann (1994) stated three assumptions that may underlie any goal—knowledge of self and others, knowledge of social interaction, and communication skills—and argued that sometimes



these components may not work together, as when a person has knowledge of social interaction (knows what to do) but does not possess the communication skills to accomplish what is needed. Interactants also tailor messages to counter anticipated hindrances (Francik & Clark, 1985; Ifert & Roloff, 1998).

In cases of dissent messages, some of those anticipated hindrances might involve the organizational context. A supervisor's status would shape the influence interaction if the dissenter knew that supervisor was biased against the potential dissent message. Krone and Ludlum (1990) found that influence was shaped primarily by three factors: perceived effectiveness of the message, perceived organizational appropriateness of the message, and the relative availability of various compliance-gaining tactics. Those who choose to express dissent, then, will tailor the message and choose the audience based on goals, but also based on the idea of overcoming organizational obstacles.

In other instances, multiple goals may conflict with each other, and that conflict becomes an obstacle itself. Using Dillard et al.'s (1989) idea of primary and secondary goals, primary goals may require choices that cross the boundaries permitted by secondary goals. As goals conflict, they may require organizational actors to either construct contradicting messages or to make choices between objectives important for organizational life. For example, an employee may try to marshal support against a common supervisor or a controversial organizational policy, and one way to gain that support is through expressing dissent to coworkers. So the primary goal might be to influence coworkers to oppose the supervisor or policy, while the secondary goal might be building a stronger relationship with coworkers. These goals may conflict for the

employee, particularly if coworkers do not respond favorably to the dissent. Thus, dissent messages are constructed in such ways and given to such audiences as to advance as much as possible multiple, and sometimes conflicting, goals.

### *Connecting Goals to Behavior*

One of the important assumptions here is the idea that multiple influence goals can be connected to compliance gaining behavior (Berger, 2002; Dillard, 1990a, Dillard et al., 2002, O’Keefe & Shepherd, 1987). Dillard (1990a) noted that an individual would plan how to influence others based on influence goals, and those plans represent the thoughts that connect goals to actions (Berger, 1997; Stiff and Mongeau, 2003). Berger argued that plans would vary based on complexity, in particular the number of contingencies that could be accommodated by a plan. Stiff and Mongeau (2003) summarized much of the research on primary and secondary goals and plans, suggesting that primary influence goals had strong effects on messages, as did secondary goals involving identity and interaction.

Given that, through planning, goals are likely to have an effect on messages, one can reasonably assume that an employee’s goals will play an important role in a dissent encounter. As stated earlier, various scholars have advanced different ways of classifying the goals an individual may pursue in an interpersonal influence situation, but many of the goals may not apply in the organizational context or in the relatively specific situation of expressing dissent. To that end, there is a need to understand what goals organizational dissenters are pursuing. Although there have been critiques of previous classification systems (Kellermann & Cole, 1994; O’Keefe, 1997), Dillard et al.

(2002) argued that categorical schemes may be the most useful way to illuminate nuances in data as long as those categories “are used *within clearly specified contextual boundaries*” (p. 449, emphasis in original). Thus, these last two research questions should lead to categories of influence goals in instances of organizational dissent and to connections between those goals and dissent messages.

**RQ4:** What goals shape dissent interactions with supervisors and coworkers?

**RQ5:** In what ways are influence goals and organizational dissent messages linked?

#### *Summary of Influence Section*

Interpersonal influence conceptualizes interactants as being goal-driven, formulating a plan to achieve their goals, and using that plan to construct influence messages. Considering dissent in light of this influence perspective, dissent becomes a process in which workers pursue goals, think through plans to achieve those goals, and produce messages based on those plans to influence others. Certainly there may be times where employees use “canned plans” based on past experiences, but nevertheless, dissent is a process based on influencing those around us to achieve one or several goals. An employee experiences a triggering event at work, perhaps because of an encounter with a supervisor, a frustrating organizational policy or practice, or some other unwanted instance. The employee wants to do something about the event. He or she may express such frustrations to a supervisor, attempting to change the situation (upward dissent). The employee may express those grievances to an external friend or family member, looking for sympathy or consolation (displaced dissent). Or the employee may talk

about the triggering situation to coworkers, seeking emotional support, change, or simply agreement from the coworker (lateral dissent). In any of these cases, the dissenter, driven by goals, constructs a message to accomplish those goals. Interpersonal influence represents an appropriate theoretical frame from which to consider dissent messages, overcoming several of the shortcomings of previous work. Understanding these conflicting goals and accompanying messages may be an important key to understanding dissent.

### *Summary of Chapter I*

Hegstrom (1999) argued that dissent is understudied in organizational communication, and this dissertation fills part of that hole. The present study focuses primarily on upward and lateral dissent and argues that dissent messages are the product of workplace relationships and multiple, compliance-gaining goals. Dissent is the informal expression to another person or persons of disagreement with organizational policies or with a supervisor. This dissertation focuses on the social nature of dissent, examining dissent messages in the context of relationships with supervisors and coworker and considering how those messages are derived from a variety of goals regarding influence, facework, and other concerns. Research questions address messages and how workplace relationships may affect those messages, as well as how various goals also shape dissent. Research question one asks about types of messages used in organizational dissent. Research questions two and three examine the quality of relationships with supervisors and coworkers, respectively, and how those relationships may affect messages. Finally, research question four inquires into the types of goals

used in organizational dissent, while research question five links those goals to messages. The next chapter recounts the methods used for exploring these concepts, methods combining semi-structured interviews with quantitative survey data. Chapter III relates the results of these procedures. Finally, chapter IV brings these results together in discussing these results in light of the literature and in illustrating how these data advance what we know about organizational dissent.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS OF STUDY

As the literature suggests, dissent as interpersonal influence represents a complicated concept. Employees express dissent messages to different audiences for a variety of reasons and do so for multiple goals. To capture that complexity, this research was completed in two distinct phases in order to develop and refine a framework from which to better understand organizational dissent messages. Several scholars have advocated combining quantitative and qualitative methods to examine a single phenomenon (e.g. Benoit, 1988; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Jick, 1983). Browning (1978) discussed the merits of both qualitative and quantitative research by saying “qualitative data are more useful than quantitative data for the discovery of variables, substantive categories, and hypotheses, while quantitative research is best used in further exploration and testing theory” (p. 93). Kassing (1998) argued that most research on resistance in organizations has focused upon localized, contextual situations, and scholars could benefit from more methodological variety in order to move results to more general populations.

Research on interpersonal influence goals and messages has developed primarily around two research programs, each with a different philosophy of the relationship between theory and data. Marwell and Schmidt (1967) developed a typology of 16 influence tactics, building their typology from theory and previous influence research. They then presented study participants with situations describing a person using each tactic. This deductive approach relies on theory and develops a priori categories of

messages to explore influence. Breaking from that perspective, Wiseman and Schenk-Hamlin (1981) took a more inductive approach by describing a situation that would call for influence and asking participants what they would say in response to each scenario. Analyzing the messages from this method generated a list of 14 influence tactics. Considerable debate has followed both of these perspectives, with each side arguing that its results were more appropriate than the other point of view. This dissertation adopts elements from each perspective in two distinct phases. In phase one, interview respondents are asked to discuss their goals and communication in dissent situations. These open-ended responses are then coded by coders guided by an initial coding system but given the flexibility to consider alternative codes for dissent messages and goals. Phase two, on the other hand, presents participants with situations and questions based on previous literature and the first portion of the study. In phase two, specific dissent messages are again measured using a free response format and coded with the system developed and refined in phase one. The remainder of this chapter explains in more detail the procedures for each study.

### *Phase One*

Phase one of this study included 40 participants in structured interviews (see Appendix A for the interview protocol) during which participants were asked about their dissent behavior. Research question one addresses organizational dissent messages, research questions two and three look at the audience for dissent and the quality of relationship between the dissenter and the audience, and research questions four and five examine the relevance of influence goals in organizational dissent and link dissent

messages to those goals. To answer those questions, interview participants described dissent in their organization and gave some of the context in which that dissent occurred. Hegstrom (1999) argued that narratives from organizational members provide rich opportunities to examine dissent situations, particularly when those dissent expressions involve upward or lateral dissent. Of note in these interviews were goals for dissent encounters, the message itself, and the audience to whom the dissent was expressed. The sections that follow address the participants, interview procedures, and response coding that took place in phase one of this dissertation.

### *Participants*

Forty participants were recruited by students in two different colleges (see Kassing, 2000a and Kramer & Hess, 2002 for examples of using undergraduate students as a sampling method). Students enrolled in a public speaking class at a suburban community college as well as students enrolled in an undergraduate persuasion course and an undergraduate interpersonal communication course at a large Southwest university were given extra credit for recruiting subjects to participate in interviews. Students were asked to recruit someone based on five criteria:

- (1) the participant has worked in his/her current job for at least one year,
- (2) the participant works at least 25 hours per week,
- (3) the participant is not self-employed,
- (4) the participant could not be considered “management” by people in the organization, and



(5) the participant is willing to meet for an interview within close distance to the college.

Students recruiting interview participants were enrolled in summer term courses at their respective institutions and received a small amount of course credit in exchange for providing the name and contact information of a willing participant. Of the participants recruited by these students, 15 were male, and 25 were female and they had an average of 2.26 years of tenure in their jobs.

### *Interview Procedures*

As students provided the names and contact information for participants, those participants were contacted and interviews were scheduled. I conducted interviews at convenient locations for participants, primarily at an on-campus office during business hours and coffee shops or restaurants during off-peak hours. Because the off-campus venues were typically not crowded during off-peak hours, interruptions and background noise were not problems. One interview took place in an empty classroom in the school where the participant was employed after school had been dismissed. Another interview occurred in a conference room on the campus of the community college. Interviews were scheduled at convenient times for participants throughout the day and early evening.

These interviews followed a structured guide (Appendix A) that addressed the following topic areas: current job title and responsibilities, tenure in that position and in the organization, general quality of relationships with supervisors and coworkers, and dissent in the workplace. I asked participants to describe an example of a time when

they disagreed with their supervisor or with an organizational policy. They were directed to explain with whom they discussed this disagreement, what they said, and why they said anything at all. If participants described an incident in which they expressed dissent to a supervisor, I probed to ask if they could remember another time when they talked with coworkers. If participants described an event involving coworkers as an audience, I asked them to recall one where they approached a supervisor. Interviews lasted approximately twenty to thirty minutes. I then transcribed these interviews, yielding 118 single-spaced pages of data.

### *Response Coding*

Those pages of data were then coded by three undergraduate research assistants. I trained research assistants using two hypothetical interview responses. Coders then worked through transcripts four at a time in order to refine the coding scheme. After four such iterations (a total of 6 iterations for the codebook), when the coders and I felt that the codebook was sufficient, those research assistants then examined all of the transcripts and coded the audience of the dissent message, the participant's quality of relationship with that audience, the goal or goals for expressing the message, and message type itself. The research assistants began by identifying organizational dissent messages in the transcripts following the definition given in chapter I, the informal expression to another person or persons of disagreement with an organizational policy or a supervisor, finding 84 messages that met that definition. The following paragraphs describe the specific coding procedures used for relevant concepts in this research.

*Dissent audience.* Audience was coded using Kassing's (1997, 1998; Kassing & Armstrong, 2002) three categories—upward, lateral, and displaced, where upward dissent was expressed to a supervisor, lateral to a coworker, and displaced to someone outside the organization.

*Nature of supervisor-subordinate relationship.* In instances of upward dissent, supervisor relationship quality was coded using a system based on leader-member exchange theory, in which relational quality can be high, medium, or low (Kramer, 1995). Kramer described a low quality leader-member exchange as an overseer relationship in which communication was primarily task-oriented with little social or emotional support. Medium quality leader-member exchange involved communication associated with job or career feedback as well as more personal communication. High quality leader-member exchange, or partnership relationship, was described as open communication on most subjects and efforts to provide emotional support in the workplace and home. For high LMX, coders were instructed to look for instances of seeking emotional support from supervisors, for trust with personal information, and for frequent communication. For medium LMX, coders were instructed to look for instances of trust with job-related information (but not personal information), for frequent communication, and for indicators of an adequate relationship, but one that could be better. For low LMX, coders were instructed to look for infrequent communication, lack of trust with personal or job-related information, and lack of commitment. If coders were unable to determine the quality of relationships with a supervisor, they marked the quality as “uncertain.”

*Nature of coworker relationship.* When narratives involved lateral dissent, coworker relationship quality was coded based on the quality of relationship—informative, collegial, or special (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Information peers were considered as those used exclusively or almost exclusively for sharing of workplace knowledge, and coders were told to include those in this category who limited communication to coworkers to only that information needed to complete the tasks of the job. Collegial peers were classified as those where respondents seek career strategy, job-related feedback, and friendship. Coders looked for those respondents who reported seeking career advice or job feedback, but who generally did not spend a lot of time communicating about non-work subjects. Coders identified special peers by references to emotional support and personal feedback. As with supervisors, if coders were not able to determine the quality of relationships with coworkers, they marked that relationships as “uncertain.” Because of the nature of research questions for this study, quality of relationship was not coded when dissent was expressed to a displaced or external audience.

*Dissent goals.* As discussed in chapter I, the interpersonal influence literature is replete with typologies of goals in interpersonal encounters. I had hoped to find a theoretically relevant study and adopt its typology and measurement in this study, but the research on influence goals primarily deals with romantic encounters, which includes some goals that would be irrelevant in workplace relationships and excludes potentially important objectives in workplace relationships that might not emerge as clearly in romantic relationships. Because of these shortcomings, several studies were examined

and potential workplace goals were selected from those studies as a starting point for searching the data for emergent goals. Kellermann (2004) listed thirteen goals in compliance-gaining: provide guidance, get advice, obtain favor, obtain information, share time together, initiate relationship, move relationship forward, end relationship, get date, obtain permission, change opinion, fulfill obligation, and stop annoying habit (p. 407). Certainly, some of these goals (i.e., provide guidance, get advice, obtain information, and change opinion) could be goals relevant to situations of workplace dissent, but other goals included on this list (i.e., share time together, get date, and the three change relationship goals) did not seem to fit as well in considering organizational dissent. Additionally, some of the goals considered by Kellermann (i.e., obtain favor, obtain permission, fulfill obligation, and stop annoying habit) were all more specific examples of the more general goals of gaining assistance or changing behavior. In considering another typology of interpersonal influence goals, Dillard (1989) listed six influence goals: give advice on lifestyle, give advice on health, gain assistance, share activity, change political stance, and change relationship. Some of these did not seem to fit the context of workplace dissent, though others were appropriate for a consideration of organizational communication processes.

Studying intraorganizational influence tactics, Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980) identified five reasons for exercising influence: obtain assistance on own job, get others to do their jobs, obtain personal benefits, initiate change in work, and improve target's performance. Several of these seem to relate to gaining assistance and changing behavior. Improving target's performance could be similar to providing guidance. One

thing that may be left out from these studies is the idea of expressing emotions for the sake of catharsis, what many people describe as “venting.” Emotional support may be the most important attribute of social connections in the workplace (Hinson Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, & Lillis, 1997; House, 1981), and certainly dissent and the accompanying emotions of frustration, disappointment, or anger may be expressed in efforts to seek that emotional support. Based on these ideas, six goals were retained to describe workplace influence. Table 1 lists the synthesis of workplace influence goals from these studies.

Table 1

*Workplace Influence Goals*

| Goal               | Description   |
|--------------------|---|
| Provide Guidance   | To provide guidance or direction to another, to suggest what the audience can do better   |
| Get Advice         | To obtain recommendation or direction on what to do next, to find out how the audience would handle the situation                             |
| Obtain Information | To get more information or evidence about the situation, to find out the audience’s perception of the situation                               |
| Change Opinion     | To change someone’s opinion about the situation, to make them understand the dissenter’s dissatisfaction                                      |
| Gain Assistance    | To build support or gain assistance in changing the behavior of a person other than the audience, to build a coalition against another person |
| Change Behavior    | To change the behavior of the audience, to have the audience change the situation   |
| Express Emotions   | To vent emotions to another person  |

In contrast to the consideration of primary influence goals, secondary goals (e.g., those regarding the relationship that may serve as a constraint on primary goals) are

likely to be less contextual. Given this, Dillard, et al.'s (1989) list of secondary goals was used as a guide for goals that may bound the pursuit of primary goals. Those goals are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

*Secondary Goals*

| Goal                | Description   |
|---------------------|---|
| Identity            | Self-concept, being true to oneself or one's standards/values   |
| Interaction         | Social appropriateness, making a good impression  |
| Personal Resource   | Deals with threats to oneself, protecting your resources  |
| Relational Resource | Deals with potential damage to the relationship, protecting the relationship or the other person's feelings |
| Arousal Management  | Reduce possibility or intensity of nervousness or fear.   |

However, these goals were considered only as a starting point during part one of the dissertation, recognizing that other goals may emerge while one or more of these goals may not be present. During the coder training, provide guidance was clarified to included only those instances where the dissenter was suggesting ways the audience could do his/her job better, obtain information was made to include asking for confirmation of details of the situation, express emotion was expanded to also involve messages that only seek attention from the audience, and interaction was also made to include maintaining a good impression. Coders used the descriptions next to each primary and secondary goal to identify goals in the responses of interview participants.

No distinction was made for coders between primary and secondary goals, but coders were instructed that each message could be connected to multiple goals.

*Dissent messages.* The coding scheme for categorizing dissent messages was developed using dissent strategies identified in previous research. Kipnis et al. (1980) describe eight types of influence tactics in organizational interactions with supervisors, coworkers, and subordinates: assertiveness, ingratiation, rational argument, sanctions, exchange, upward appeal, blocking, and coalitions. Assertiveness was operationalized as checking up on the audience, being a nuisance, expressing anger, pointing out required compliance, or demanding compliance. Ingratiation included humility, making the other person feel important, praising/sympathizing with the audience, and pretending to let the other person make the decision. Rational arguments incorporated providing information that supports one's argument, logical reasoning, compromise, and displaying expertise. Sanctions encompassed any negative actions or threats of action against the other person. Conversely, exchange included offering to do anything in exchange for the other person's action or reminding them of past favors and obligations. Upward appeals involved formal and informal messages to people higher than the other person. Blocking was similar to sanctions, but more specifically involved threatening to prevent or slow down work unless the audience complied. Finally, coalitions concerned getting assistance from coworkers or subordinates. Kassing (2002) inductively derived five strategies for expressing dissent: direct-factual appeal, repetition, solution presentation, circumvention, and threatening resignation. Direct-factual appeal included attempts to use logical arguments and evidence to support one's position. Repetition



was repeating the same message to supervisors. Dissent that included a solution to resolve the dissatisfaction was coded as solution presentation. Circumvention was operationalized as going above the supervisor's head, and threatening resignation included any expression that also indicated the employee might leave the organization if the situation was not resolved.

The tactics of Kipnis et al. (1980) and strategies of Kassing (2002) address the range of options available to an organizational member expressing dissent when his or her goals are to provide guidance, gain assistance/change behavior, and/or change opinion, and potentially when the organizational member wants to get advice or obtain information. But these tactics do not seem to cover messages expressed to fulfill other goals. Dissent messages to get advice and obtain information maybe include requests rather than or in addition to statements. In that direction, messages to get advice may ask for direction, while those to obtain information may simply seek more details on the dissent trigger or on potential solutions for that trigger. Messages to express emotions may make no request of the audience other than to listen.

Because of the uncertainties when coding messages, a more tentative coding procedure was used for these responses, using ideas from Kassing (2002) and Kipnis et al. (1980) as starting points. The initial coding scheme for the interview portion of the study is presented in Table 3.

Coders were given specific instructions for occasions when messages might fit into multiple types because coders were told that messages should be coded into only one type. The three research assistants were trained to code messages in the same way

that they were trained for influence goals, and it was understood that some of these message types might not be used while there may be messages that need a new type to be described. The result was a typology of messages associated with the various workplace influence goals and a description of the general characteristics of each type of message. This typology is presented in chapter III.

Table 3

*Initial Message Types as Taken from Previous Literature*

| Message Type            | Description   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Assertiveness           | checking up on the audience, being a nuisance, pointing out required compliance, or demanding compliance from the audience                                  |
| Ingratiation            | humility, making the other person feel important, praising/sympathizing with the audience, and pretending to let the other person make a decision           |
| Rational arguments      | providing information that supports one's argument, logical reasoning, compromise, and displaying expertise   |
| Sanctions               | any negative actions or threats of action against the other person  |
| Exchange                | offering to do anything in exchange for the other person's action, reminding them of past favors and obligations  |
| Upward appeals          | formal and informal messages to people higher than the other person, going above the head of the person causing dissatisfaction, going to your boss's boss. |
| Blocking                | similar to sanctions, but more specifically involved threatening to prevent or slow down work unless the audience complied                                  |
| Coalitions              | getting assistance from the audience, recruitment attempts, asking audience if they <i>feel</i> the same way about the dissatisfaction issue                |
| Repetition              | repeating a dissent message to the same audience  |
| Threatening resignation | threatening to resign if the audience doesn't do something about the event or issue   |
| Solution presentation   | providing a realistic solution to the event or issue causing dissatisfaction  |

*Reliabilities.* Coders agreed on 83 of 84 audiences, and Cohen's kappa was .96, .94, and .93 for audience. Coders agreed on 48 of 84 qualities of relationship and kappa was .38, .39, and .35 for quality of relationship. Coders agreed on 41 of 84 message types and kappa was .57, .41, and .54 for message type. Because coders were able to code goals as one goal or as many as twelve goals, kappa was not an appropriate measure of agreement. Coders expressed complete agreement on the subset of goals in 27 of 84 cases (32.14%). This is admittedly a conservative indicator of agreement. Another way to assess reliability in this case might be to consider whether coders agreed in the presence or absence of each goal for each case (Watt & van den Berg, 1995). With this method, there would be twelve points (one for each goal) of potential agreement for each case, and agreement on the presence or the absence of each goal would be counted. Using this procedure, coders agreed on 881 out of 1,008 potential agreements (87.40%), which is above Watt and van den Berg's suggested threshold of 80%.

As indicated by kappa scores, intercoder reliability was low for quality of relationship and message type. However, for each message, disagreements in all of the variables were resolved by discussions, and all three coders agreed upon final codings unanimously.

#### *Analysis for Phase One*

Research question one addresses the nature of dissent messages, and so the typology developed for messages will be used to partially answer this question. The frequency of types that are found in the interview data will show which types may be

more dominant and which types may be neglected. This typology will also set a foundation for the analysis of phase two. Research questions two and three address how audience and quality of relationship affect dissent messages. The data from interviews may indicate which messages are favored for particular audiences. Research questions four and five address the goals that affect dissent messages as influence. One point of interest with regard to research question five is which goals are paired with particular messages types, and so as coders examine goals, the connection between goals and message types will be noted. Additionally, the analysis of goals in part one will serve to highlight any omissions in the questions used for the survey developed for the second phase of this dissertation. The results of these analyses are presented in chapter III.

### *Phase Two*

Phase two of this study revisited those messages and goals in a more deductive way using specific scenarios asking what goals would be important for participants as they prepared to express dissent regarding that scenario and what they would actually say in such an encounter. This part of the study also addressed research questions two and three regarding the effect of audience and quality of relationship with audience by manipulating the person to whom participants should anticipate speaking and by manipulating the intimacy of their relationship with that anticipated audience. The following sections describe the refinement of scenarios through pilot testing, participants in this phase of the dissertation, and procedures used for collecting data with the final instrument.

### *Pilot Test*

An instrument was developed to operationalize dissent message strategies and relate those strategies to the nature of the relationship between the dissenter and his or her audience (supervisor or coworker). To enhance the ecological validity of the research, scenarios were developed that represented five different dissent triggers from the literature. Triggers included an undeserving coworker being promoted ahead of the respondent, the respondent's ideas being consistently overlooked, a coworker not pulling their weight, an employee stealing from the company, and management suddenly changing popular policies with no explanations. In the main study, scenarios paired each of the triggers with one of six relational conditions—high, medium, low quality relationships with supervisors (Fairhurst, 2001; Kramer, 1995) and informative, collegial, and special relationships with coworkers (Kram & Isabella, 1985)—based on the definitions of these concepts discussed above (see Appendix B for descriptions of these scenarios and relational conditions). This yielded a variety of forms of the instrument, where each participant responded to one trigger and one relational condition. Based on Jackson and Brashers (1994) criteria for random and fixed factors, audience and relational condition are treated as fixed factors because the various levels of each factor could not be interchanged without altering the theoretical implications of the study, and trigger is treated as a fixed factor because of the exploratory nature of this project.

To ensure that each trigger scenario represented a realistic distinct circumstance, scenarios were pilot tested using participants in three classes during the spring semester

before the main sample was administered. These students were in an introduction to speech course ( $n = 19$ ), an interpersonal communication course ( $n = 20$ ), and a public speaking course ( $n = 17$ ) at the suburban community college. The pilot test (Appendix C) consisted of each of the five triggers used in the scenarios followed by a series of seven questions asking about (1) whether the situation sounded like something that could actually happen in the workplace, and (2) whether they would be likely to discuss this situation with their supervisor or coworker. These questions were measured on five point Likert scales. In order to eliminate any effect of the order of triggers, six different forms were used, varying the order in which triggers were presented.

Additionally, the last two scenarios in each form were paired with a relational condition, one for supervisor and one for coworker. After the seven questions regarding the trigger, there were three questions that addressed the perceived relationship, communication, and trust between the participant and the supervisor or coworker described in the scenario. These questions were also measured on a five-point Likert scale and were designed to examine whether the three relational conditions for each of the two audiences were distinguishable as being different levels. The various levels were also varied on the six forms so that participants would not see the same pairing between supervisor relational condition and coworker relational condition.

### *Pilot Test Results*

One question that the pilot test sought to answer was whether the five scenarios would be seen as realistic. To that end, three items measured the degree to which respondents ( $n = 56$ ) saw the scenarios as potentially real situations. Reliability analysis

yielded  $\alpha = .80$ , suggesting that the scale is reliable. Given that reliability, the mean of those three items was taken to yield a measure of realism. Table 4 shows the mean of the realism measure for each of the five triggers.

Table 4

*Trigger Means for Realism*

| Trigger           | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------|------|----------------|
| Promotion         | 3.93 | 0.85           |
| Overlooked        | 3.93 | 0.77           |
| Slacking Coworker | 4.33 | 0.82           |
| Stealing          | 3.90 | 0.84           |
| Policy Change     | 3.82 | 1.04           |

A second part of the pilot test concerned whether respondents would consider talking to supervisors and/or coworkers about the situation. Two items for supervisors and two items for coworkers measured that likelihood. Reliability analysis showed good reliability for both the supervisor scale ( $\alpha = .83$ ) and the coworker scale ( $\alpha = .90$ ). The mean of each of those pairs of items was taken to yield a “likelihood to talk to supervisor” measure and a “likelihood to talk to coworker” measure. Tables 5 and 6 show the means for each of those measures.

Table 5

*Trigger Means for Likelihood to Talk to Supervisor*

| Trigger           | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------|------|----------------|
| Promotion         | 3.41 | 1.25           |
| Overlooked        | 3.72 | 1.10           |
| Slacking Coworker | 4.05 | 1.04           |
| Stealing          | 3.88 | 0.91           |
| Policy Change     | 3.37 | 1.12           |

Table 6

*Trigger Means for Likelihood to Talk to Coworker*

| Trigger           | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------|------|----------------|
| Promotion         | 3.80 | 1.17           |
| Overlooked        | 3.72 | 1.19           |
| Slacking Coworker | 3.56 | 1.22           |
| Stealing          | 2.99 | 1.40           |
| Policy Change     | 4.38 | 0.85           |

As shown in those tables, all of the triggers were above the scale midpoint in terms of realism and likelihood of talking to supervisor. However, the scenario involving an employee stealing was below the midpoint for likelihood to talk to coworker. After reflecting on these results, it seems plausible that people would not want to criticize a popular coworker to other coworkers for fear that the criticism may be reported to the problematic and popular coworker. Although this item was only slightly below the midpoint of 3, it seemed that scenario four might not be plausible for



coworker dissent, and that scenario was dropped from the final instrument. The other scenarios were retained.

The final part of the pilot test dealt with whether respondents would perceive differences in the relational conditions for supervisors and coworkers. That is, given a medium LMX description or an informative peer description, would respondents recognize a medium level of intimacy with a supervisor or a more distant relationship with a coworker? Three items asked respondents to rate their relationship with a supervisor based on the information given in the description, one item each focusing on closeness of relationship, openness of communication, and level of trust, which are three indicators typical of LMX studies (Fairhurst, 2001; Krone, 1992; Sias et al., 2002). Reliability analysis indicating  $\alpha = .91$ , a high level of reliability. Three other items explored relationships with coworkers in much the same way, measuring relationship, openness, and trust with the coworker presented in the description. Although the variables often used in LMX studies are not precisely the same variables as those by Kram and Isabella (1985), it seems likely that relationship, openness, and trust would increase as feedback, friendship, and emotional support increase, and other research has noted the similarities between factors of LMX and peer relationships. Reliability analysis for these items indicated  $\alpha = .71$ , suggesting adequate reliability. Given these alpha scores, the mean of each set of items was taken to yield a supervisor relational score and a coworker relational score, respectively.

Two univariate analyses of variance were used to determine if respondents saw significant differences between the relational descriptions. Tables 7 and 8 indicate the results of the tests for supervisor relational score.

Table 7

*Means and Confidence Intervals for Supervisor Relational Description*

|            | Mean  | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|------------|-------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Supervisor |       |            | Lower Bound             | Upper Bound |
| low        | 2.544 | .182       | 2.180                   | 2.908       |
| medium     | 3.750 | .177       | 3.395                   | 4.105       |
| high       | 4.392 | .192       | 4.007                   | 4.777       |

Table 8

*Analysis of Variance for Supervisor Relationship*

| Source          | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F        | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|-----------------|-------------------------|----|-------------|----------|------|---------------------|
| Corrected Model | 32.080                  | 2  | 16.040      | 25.619   | .000 | .492                |
| Intercept       | 707.261                 | 1  | 707.261     | 1129.660 | .000 | .955                |
| SUPERVISOR      | 32.080                  | 2  | 16.040      | 25.619   | .000 | .492                |
| Error           | 33.182                  | 53 | .626        |          |      |                     |
| Total           | 765.333                 | 56 |             |          |      |                     |
| Corrected Total | 65.262                  | 55 |             |          |      |                     |

a. R Squared = .492 (Adjusted R Squared = .472)

The F-value indicates that there were significant differences in the way that respondents perceived relational descriptions, and the means and confidence intervals show that those differences were as expected. Although there is some overlap between the confidence levels for medium and high LMX (levels 2 and 3), the overlap is slight and

the difference is still significant as Tukey HSD post hoc tests showed a significant difference in means for all three levels. The results for coworker relational score are given in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9

*Means and Confidence Intervals for Coworker Relational Description*

| Coworker | Mean  | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|----------|-------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
|          |       |            | Lower Bound             | Upper Bound |
| low      | 2.882 | .190       | 2.502                   | 3.263       |
| medium   | 4.016 | .171       | 3.674                   | 4.358       |
| high     | 4.148 | .184       | 3.778                   | 4.518       |

Table 10

*Analysis of Variance for Coworker Relationship*

| Source          | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F        | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|-----------------|-------------------------|----|-------------|----------|------|---------------------|
| Corrected Model | 17.064                  | 2  | 8.532       | 13.948   | .000 | .345                |
| Intercept       | 753.233                 | 1  | 753.233     | 1231.384 | .000 | .959                |
| COWORKER        | 17.064                  | 2  | 8.532       | 13.948   | .000 | .345                |
| Error           | 32.420                  | 53 | .612        |          |      |                     |
| Total           | 822.056                 | 56 |             |          |      |                     |
| Corrected Total | 49.484                  | 55 |             |          |      |                     |

a. R Squared = .345 (Adjusted R Squared = .320)

The F value for coworker description shows that there were significant differences in the way that respondents perceived their relationship with coworkers. However, the confidence intervals and Tukey HSD post hoc test indicate that those differences were from levels 1-2 and 1-3, but not between levels 2 and 3. That is, respondents perceived differences between informative peer and collegial and special

peers, but not between collegial and special peers. To correct for this problem in the main survey, a clause was added to the description of the collegial peer stating that the participant did not depend on this worker for emotional support (see italics in description in Appendix B).

### *Participants*

Participants for the main portion of the survey were recruited by students enrolled in summer public speaking classes at a large Southwest university. Student were given course credit for recruiting four survey participants based on the same criteria as described in part one with the exception that part two participants did not need to be local (criterion five). Students were given four envelopes, four surveys, and four consent forms. Participants were asked to place their phone numbers underneath their signatures on the consent forms so they could be called to verify that they had completed the survey. The instructions also indicated that participants should return the survey and consent form in the envelope to the student who gave it to them, and students then returned the envelopes to their instructors. 609 surveys were returned in this way. After 25% of participants were called to confirm their involvement, consent forms were separated from surveys to preserve anonymity. Of the surveys returned, 493 had complete data and were used for the analyses in this dissertation. 54% of participants were female, they were an average of 26 years old ( $SD = 9.974$ ), and had 3.19 years of tenure ( $SD = 4.885$ ) in their current job.

### *Instrument*

As described above, the main instrument of the dissertation (see Appendix D) involved one of now four triggers and one of six relational descriptions (three for supervisor and three for coworker). A series of questions followed the scenario asking about goals that participants might think relevant to the interaction that was suggested, either with a supervisor or with a coworker. Sixteen questions were developed that examined the dissent influence goals described in Table 1 in part one of this study. Participants were asked to imagine the upcoming conversation and respond on five-point Likert scales as to what degree each of the goals was pertinent. Questions six through twenty-five of Dillard et al.'s (1989) 25-item scale were used to examine secondary goals, and questions were reordered and adjusted slightly to accommodate the content and context of this study. Again, five-point Likert scales were used to measure responses. Table 11 shows each goal, the questions that reference those goals, and the alpha reliability scores for each subscale.

As shown in the table, several reliabilities were problematic. Goals of gain assistance and change behavior were particularly low and were treated as individual items for the analysis. Express emotion was low, but the items seemed to make sense together conceptually so the items were treated as a scale despite the low reliability. Relational resource was also low, but items made sense together and Dillard et al. (1989) reported high reliability, suggesting that these items might also be treated as a scale. Although the reliability of express emotion and relational resource is certainly questionable, this study considers those items as scales with caution.

Table 11

*Questions Associated with Various Goals*

| Goal                                 | Questions   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Provide Guidance<br>$\alpha = .74$   | ...provide guidance to your supervisor/coworker?<br>... give direction to your supervisor/coworker?   |
| Get Advice<br>$\alpha = .65$         | ... solicit recommendations about what to do?<br>... receive some direction about what you need to do next?<br>... receive your supervisor's/coworker's advice?   |
| Obtain Information<br>$\alpha = .78$ | ... get more information about the situation?<br>... gain facts about the situation?  |
| Change Opinion<br>$\alpha = .82$     | ... change his/her opinion of the situation?<br>... change your supervisor's/coworker's mind?   |
| Gain Assistance<br>$\alpha = .47$    | ... build support for your position?<br>... receive assistance from your supervisor/coworker?   |
| Change Behavior<br>$\alpha = .44$    | ... change the behavior of the supervisor/coworker to whom you are talking?<br>... change the behavior of the person you think is causing the problem?  |
| Express Emotions<br>$\alpha = .56$   | ... express your emotions to your supervisor/coworker?<br>... "clear the air" regarding this situation?<br>... "get this off your chest"?   |
| Identity<br>$\alpha = .67$           | *In this situation, I would not be concerned with sticking to my own standards.<br>In this situation, I would be very concerned about behaving in a mature, responsible manner.<br>In this situation, I would be concerned with not violating my own ethical standards.<br>In this situation, I would be concerned about being true to myself and my values.<br>In this situation, I would be concerned about maintaining my own ethical standards. |

Table 11 Continued

| Goal                                  | Questions   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Interaction<br>$\alpha = .61$         | <p>In this situation, I would be careful to avoid saying things which were socially inappropriate.</p> <p>I would be concerned with making (or maintaining) a good impression when I talk with my supervisor/coworker.</p> <p>I would be very conscious of what was appropriate and inappropriate in this situation.</p> <p>I would be concerned with putting myself in a “bad light” in this situation.</p> <p>I wouldn’t want to look stupid while trying to persuade my supervisor/coworker.</p> |
| Personal Resource<br>$\alpha = .61$   | <p>The person to whom I am talking could make things very bad for me if I kept on bugging him/her.</p> <p>I would be worried about a threat to my safety if I pushed the issue in this situation.</p> <p>My supervisor/coworker might take advantage of me if I tried too hard to convince him/her.</p>   |
| Relational Resource<br>$\alpha = .55$ | <p>*Getting what I want in this situation would be more important to me than preserving the relationship with my supervisor/coworker.</p> <p>In this situation, I would not be willing to risk possible damage to the relationship in order to get what I wanted.</p> <p>*I wouldn’t really care if I made my supervisor/coworker mad or not in this situation.</p>   |
| Arousal Management<br>$\alpha = .69$  | <p>This situation’s potential for making me nervous and uncomfortable would worry me.</p> <p>*This situation is <i>not</i> the type of interaction that makes me nervous.</p> <p>In talking to my supervisor/coworker, I would avoid saying things which might make me apprehensive or nervous.</p> <p>In this situation, I would be afraid of being uncomfortable or nervous.</p>  |

\* = reverse coded

Following the questions on goals, respondents were then asked to write exactly what they would say to the identified audience in the upcoming interaction. Dissent

messages were then examined by the undergraduate research assistants described in part one, who coded messages by comparing them to categories of messages developed in part one. Cohen's kappa for these messages were .46, .49, and .42. Disagreements were initially dealt with by voting, yielding agreement in 85.3% of cases. The remaining disagreements were addressed in discussion until consensus was reached on all messages.

The instrument also included three questions asking whether participants considered this a realistic scenario and three questions asking about the degree of relationship, communication, and trust that participants perceived between themselves and the supervisor or coworker described in the scenario. The three items measuring realism produced  $\alpha = .78$ , and the relationship items produced  $\alpha = .86$ , both of which suggested good reliability. The mean for how realistic respondents saw the scenario was 3.81 (SD = .92), and the mean for the lowest trigger (ideas overlooked by supervisor) was 3.57 (SD = .94). There were significant differences in the relationship items based on quality of relationship with audience ( $F = 30.041$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and the means were 3.94 (high quality relationships), 3.60 (medium quality relationships), and 3.32 (low quality relationships). Tukey post hoc tests showed differences between all of the levels of relationship quality.

### *Analysis of Phase Two*

Building on the foundation from phase one, coders analyzed messages in much the same way as they coded the open-ended responses in the interviews. Frequency counts again illuminated which message types were more dominant in organizational



dissent. To answer research questions two and three, chi-square tests were used to determine differences between message expressed to supervisors and coworkers, as well as any differences based on relationship quality. Research question four was addressed by comparing the frequencies of goals guiding dissent behavior in the workplace. Finally, with regard to research question five, analysis of variance was used to examine the associations between goals and messages. Although this dissertation argues that goals precede messages, goals, which were measured using interval data, were considered the dependent variable in the ANOVA. This test is appropriate because it only establishes differences, rather than suggesting causality. Additional ANOVA were used to examine differences between goals pursued and audience and relationship quality. The results from these analyses are presented in chapter III.

### *Summary of Chapter II*

This dissertation uses two distinct phases to examine influence and dissent messages. First, structured interviews were conducted and coded, exploring messages of dissent and goals for those messages, where both messages and goals were allowed to emerge more from the data than from previous research. Interviews were transcribed and coded for audience, relationship with audience, dissent message, and goal. Phase two of this study involved a survey in which participants were presented with a scenario involving a particular trigger, an audience for their dissent, and a description of their relationship with that audience member. Participants then responded to questions about a series of influence goals, developed from interpersonal literature, and wrote what they might say in such an interaction. The next chapter describes the results from each phase,

describing the interview responses and what associations between messages and goals surfaced from those responses as well as the survey results and specific analyses using those data.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

The goal of this dissertation has been to examine dissent messages as instances of interpersonal influence. This study has proceeded in two phases. First, forty interviews were conducted and then coded for audience, quality of relationship with audience, goal(s), and message type. Second, a survey study was undertaken, involving 609 respondents. In the survey, dissent audience, quality of relationship with audience, and triggering event were controlled and dissent goals and dissent messages were measured. In the survey, messages were measured by means of an open-ended question, and coders coded these messages for message type. This chapter describes the results of analyses in this study, concentrating first on the messages that were generated by respondents in both phases of the study. The following sections then describe how those messages relate to audience and quality of relationship with audience, first in terms of phase one of the study where interview participants discussed the audience to whom they were likely to express dissent, and then in terms of phase two as participants were assigned a particular audience and quality of relationship and asked what they would say to that audience. The final section of this chapter addresses goals in organizational dissent, first by discussing what goals were found to be prevalent in each study and then by relating those goals to the content type of dissent messages.

#### *Organizational Dissent Messages*

Before discussing the research questions, several demographic variables that might affect dissent messages were examined from survey data. Chi-square tests were

used for nominal data and regression was used for continuous data, and there were no significant differences in message types based on gender ( $\chi^2 = 29.904$ ,  $p = .188$ ), education ( $\chi^2 = 67.544$ ,  $p = .627$ ), age ( $F = .031$ ,  $p = .860$ ), or tenure ( $F = .731$ ,  $p = .393$ ). There were, however, some differences in goals based on some of these demographic variables. There were significant differences in the goals of obtaining information ( $F = 3.14$ ,  $p = .044$ ,  $r^2 = .013$ ) and relational resources ( $F = 16.21$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $r^2 = .062$ ) based on gender, significant differences in the goal of identity ( $F = 2.73$ ,  $p = .013$ ,  $r^2 = .033$ ) based on education, and significant differences in the goal of interaction ( $F = 3.072$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $r^2 = .037$ ) based on an interaction of gender and education. There were also significant differences in the goals of identity ( $F = 16.53$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $r^2 = .033$ ), interaction ( $F = 4.96$ ,  $p = .026$ ,  $r^2 = .010$ ), and relational resources ( $F = 7.04$ ,  $p = .008$ ,  $r^2 = .014$ ) based on age. Thus, it appears that there were some small effects based on demographic characteristics for influence goals in dissent situations. However, these effects were few in number and very small in magnitude. Further, there were no differences in dissent messages for these control variables. Thus, it seemed reasonable to continue with the analysis for the research questions without controlling for these demographic variables through statistical means.

The first research question asks what message types were used to express organizational dissent. In each of the interviews for phase one of this study, I asked participants what they would say when they were frustrated with a supervisor or with a workplace policy. From these 40 interviews, coders noted 84 dissent messages, representing fourteen message types. Early in this process, coders noticed discrepancies

in the descriptions of several message types, such that various messages could fall into multiple types and some messages might not fall into any type at all. Because of these discrepancies and because of the iterative and tentative nature of this part of the dissertation, many of the descriptions of message types were shifted somewhat. Additionally, coders found two messages that did not really fit any of the message descriptions. One respondent stated that he would respond to a supervisor, “it's more just joking around, we try to see that he does know. Because he pretends that he doesn't, so it's more just joking around about the relationship, we haven't really sat down and had a serious... I've heard of other people who have said that they have said something to him, just offhand comments, but not really a sitdown discussion.” Another interview respondent described addressing a supervisor about a slacking coworker, stating

We made like, not rude comments, but just kind of offhand comical things. One of the days I was working for her, that morning we had a busted pipe, we had to turn off the water, had to call the plumbing all of that...[lists a number of job-related tasks]...I did a few things. And I did it, and made a sliding remark to the manager, “I've already done more than she does in a day.” And he just kind of gave me a look, like, “you know, she really needs it.” And he kind of left it at that. No one really goes into it deep or anything like that.

Because both of these messages seemed to center around humor, sarcasm, or “off-record” comments, coders agreed that there should be a category labeled “humor,” and that category is listed below. Additionally, coders thought that “sanctions” and “blocking” were similar to each other in the way participants expressed dissent, and the

coding system thus combined these two options. The final message types and descriptions are listed below in Table 12.

Table 12

*Final Message Types and Descriptions*

| Message Type            | Description   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Display Emotions        | describing emotions felt because of an issue or event   |
| Assertiveness           | checking up on the audience, being a nuisance, pointing out required compliance, or demanding compliance from the audience                                  |
| Ingratiation            | humility, making the other person feel important, praising/sympathizing with the audience, and pretending to let the other person make a decision           |
| Rational arguments      | providing information that supports one's argument, logical reasoning, compromise, and displaying expertise   |
| Sanctions               | any negative actions or threats of action against the other person  |
| Exchange                | offering to do anything in exchange for the other person's action, reminding them of past favors and obligations  |
| Upward appeals          | formal and informal messages to people higher than the other person, going above the head of the person causing dissatisfaction, going to your boss's boss. |
| Coalitions              | getting assistance from the audience, recruitment attempts, asking audience if they <i>feel</i> the same way about the dissatisfaction issue                |
| Repetition              | repeating a dissent message to the same audience  |
| Threatening resignation | threatening to resign if the audience doesn't do something about the event or issue   |
| Solution presentation   | providing a realistic solution to the event or issue causing dissatisfaction  |
| Asking for information  | Requesting information, asking what the audience would do in such circumstances, asking for confirmation of <i>facts</i> or <i>evidence</i>                 |
| Recalling events        | Describing the event/issue that caused dissatisfaction  |
| Humor                   | Using humor to informally convey dissatisfaction, joking around or offhanded comments   |

In addition to those descriptions, a series of rules were developed to clarify situations where a message might fall into more than one type. Coders were told that messages could only be described as one type, with the exception of “repetition,” in which case they were to identify what message type was being repeated. Coders were also told to focus on the words that respondents used, rather than the apparent reactions from the dissent audience. Coders were told that if the dissenter threatens resignation, they were to code the message as “threatening resignation” not as “sanctions” or “blocking,” and that if the respondent presents a solution, that message is solution presentation, even if it could also be coded as an additional message type. Frequencies of each message type from the interview transcripts are listed in Table 13. A chi-square test yielded a score of 35.14, which was significant at  $p < .05$ , indicating that the message type frequencies were significantly different from what could be expected by chance.

The message types in their final form as noted in Table 12 were then used to code the open-ended responses to the survey in part two of this study. A chi-square test yielded a score of 962.024 for the survey data, which was significant at  $p < .05$ , indicating that message frequencies were significantly different from what could be expected by chance. Table 13 shows the frequencies of each message type in interviews and surveys in addition to an example of each message type.

A post hoc analysis was conducted by constructing confidence intervals for each message type occurrence. Confidence intervals of the percentages of occurrence of each message type plus or minus three standard error indicate overlap for most of the

percentages of occurrences. Display emotion was significantly different from ingratiation and sanctions for the interview data, indicating that interview participants were more likely to display emotions than threaten sanctions or use ingratiation.

Table 13

*Frequencies and Examples of Each Message Type in Interviews and Surveys*

| Message Type       | Interview<br>Frequency | Survey<br>Frequency | Example  |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Display Emotions   | 17 (20.2%)             | 56 (11.4%)          | (from interview)“And I was like yup. I was pissed off, just this is stupid, he should know better.”  |
| Assertiveness      | 6 (7.1%)               | 20 (4.1%)           | (from interview)“You're not supposed to let them walk all over you.”   |
| Ingratiation       | 1 (1.1%)               | 5 (1.0%)            | (from survey)“I want to speak with you about the recent promotion. I have seen much evidence that this person’s quality of work is not up to your or the business’s standards. I believe this because of personal testimony that I have seen this person doing this and not doing this. You have full authority and wisdom in this situation. I just wanted to bring this to your attention because I don’t want anyone to take advantage of you.” |
| Rational arguments | 10 (11.9%)             | 42 (8.5%)           | (from survey)“Supervisor, I wanted to discuss with you _____’s promotion. I think it is unfair because he/she is always late, doesn’t work that hard, and sometimes takes credit for others’ work. I think you should reconsider”  |



Table 13 Continued

| Message Type   | Interview Frequency | Survey Frequency | Example   |
|----------------|---------------------|------------------|---|
| Sanctions      | 2 (2.3%)            | 6 (1.2%)         | (from interview)An employee dissatisfied with a manager went to another manager and threatened to appeal to a higher authority, saying, "I think if you could approach her and say something to her about this. Employees have been saying that we don't like the way things are run here, people not treating each other nicely. Otherwise we are going to call corporate and complain." |
| Exchange       | 0                   | 1 (0.2%)         | (from survey)"I am a loyal worker and have worked for you for longer than many others. I deserve to be acknowledged for my dedication."   |
| Upward appeals | 9 (10.7%)           | 13 (2.6%)        | (from interview)"We finally said something to the new general manager about it, hanging in this kid keeps switching out his salt and pepper shakers so he doesn't have to fill them."   |
| Coalitions     | 10 (11.9%)          | 34 (6.9%)        | (from interview)"Yes, we all talked about it. Not to him, just to other coworkers. We all agreed that it was kind of ridiculous that he cut our commission down after that. Which didn't really make sense because if he wanted us to sell, I don't know why he would cut us down. Everyone agreed that it wasn't fair."  |
| Repetition     | 10* (11.9%)         | 0                | (from interview)"But after a while, we started talking all the time. Whenever our boss goes to lunch, we're there alone, were always talking about him."  |

Table 13 Continued

| Message Type            | Interview Frequency | Survey Frequency | Example   |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------|---|
| Threatening resignation | 3 (3.6%)            | 6 (1.2%)         | (from interview)“ I talked to another employee about it, the guy that I play tennis with, and I was like ‘man I’m about to quit.’ He was like ‘why are you going to quit.’ I was like ‘I can’t take people not talking to each other. I’ve got three people telling me to do something, and I do one thing and the other two jump me for not doing their thing.’” |
| Solution presentation   | 8 (9.5%)            | 51 (10.3%)       | (from survey)“I think that the way the schedule was in the past was easy and very fair between us workers/employees. I would suggest we stay with that same way instead of this new way. I think that it would take pressure off of management as well. What do you think about this idea?”   |
| Asking for information  | 7 (8.3%)            | 208 (42.2%)      | (from survey)“What’s up with this new scheduling policy? Why did they change, were they having some problems? I was just wondering because I hadn’t heard of any and it seemed like a drastic and sudden change to make if we haven’t had any issues with this before.”   |
| Recalling events        | 10 (11.9%)          | 51 (10.3%)       | (from survey)“I would tell my coworker exactly what has been going on and that I am being overlooked by my supervisor.”   |

Table 13 Continued

| Message Type | Interview Frequency | Survey Frequency | Example  |
|--------------|---------------------|------------------|--|
| Humor        | 2 (2.3%)            | 0                | (from interview)—“We made like, not rude comments, but just kind of offhand comical things. One of the days I was working for her, that morning we had a busted pipe, we had to turn off the water, had to call the plumbing all of that...[lists a number of job-related tasks]...I did a few things. And I did it, and made a sliding remark to the manager, ‘It’s only 9:00, and I’ve already done more than she does in a day.’ And he just kind of gave me a look, like, ‘you know, she really needs it.’ And he kind of left it at that. No one really goes into it deep or anything like that.” |

\* Each repetition message was also coded as a different message type.

The post hoc test for the survey data revealed more significant differences. Asking for information was used significantly more than other message types. Display emotion was used significantly more than messages of assertiveness, exchange, ingratiation, sanctions, threatening resignation, or upward appeals. Messages of solution presentation were reported more than exchange, ingratiation, sanctions, threatening resignation, and upward appeals. Recalling events was used more than exchange, ingratiation, sanctions, threatening resignation, and upward appeals. Rational arguments were more prevalent than exchange, ingratiation, sanctions, and threatening resignation. Messages to build coalitions were used more than messages of exchange, ingratiation, sanctions, or threatening resignation. Finally, messages of assertiveness were used more

than messages of exchange.

Several of these messages were particularly prevalent. Messages displaying emotion and recalling events were prevalent for both interview and survey participants, indicating that an important element of dissent was describing events and emotions involved with dissatisfaction. Messages of rational arguments, upward appeals, coalitions and repetition were particularly prevalent in interviews. Messages asking for information were more prevalent for surveys, which may be due to survey respondents seeking more information about the hypothetical situation that was provided.

A chi square test comparing message types from interviews to message types from surveys indicated that there were significant differences between each measure ( $\chi^2 = 228.29$ ). Survey responses were much more likely to involve getting more information, which could be attributed to survey respondents having less information about the situation than interview participants who were describing a situation with which they were familiar. Interview participants were likely to use humor and upward appeals, which might be considered less direct ways of addressing their dissatisfaction. Additionally, no survey respondents reported using repetition as a dissent message. The next section describes how those messages related to the dissenters choice of audience.

#### *Audience and Quality of Relationship*

Research questions two and three asked if there were differences in dissent messages based on the quality of relationship between the dissenter and the audience. This section presents answers to those questions based on the interviews and surveys. But first, it is useful to consider if there were differences based on audience, a subject

that is inherent in these two research questions. Table 14 presents the results of a crosstabulation between message type and audience, including the number of occurrences of each message type for each audience, as well as the number of expected occurrences for each cell.

Table 14

*Cross-tabulation between Message Type and Audience for Interviews*

| Message Type            | Audience |            | Total |
|-------------------------|----------|------------|-------|
|                         | Coworker | Supervisor |       |
| Asking for Information  | 2        | 5          | 7     |
| Assertiveness           | 1        | 5          | 6     |
| Coalitions              | 8        | 2          | 10    |
| Display Emotion         | 14       | 3          | 17    |
| Humor                   | 0        | 2          | 2     |
| Ingratiation            | 0        | 1          | 1     |
| Rational Argument       | 2        | 8          | 10    |
| Recall Events           | 7        | 3          | 10    |
| Repetition              | 8        | 2          | 10    |
| Sanctions               | 0        | 1          | 1     |
| Solution Presentation   | 1        | 7          | 8     |
| Threatening Resignation | 0        | 3          | 3     |
| Upward Appeal           | 0        | 9          | 9     |
| <i>Total</i>            | 43       | 51         | 94    |

The chi-squared value on this crosstabulation was 39.128, which was significant at  $p < .05$ . This test indicates that messages expressed to supervisors and messages expressed to coworkers are significantly different.

Similarly, message types from the surveys were analyzed based on audience. Table 15 presents the results of a crosstabulation between message type and audience for survey responses, including the number of occurrences of each message type for each audience, as well as the number of expected occurrences for each cell.

A chi-square value of 93.086 for this test indicates that there is a significant difference between messages expressed to supervisors and to coworkers in survey responses. From both the interviews and the surveys, it is not surprising that message types such as humor, ingratiation, sanctions, solution presentation, threatening resignation, and upward appeal were more often expressed in messages directed toward supervisors. It is also not particularly surprising that coalition messages were expressed more often to coworkers. Other message types are more noteworthy. The use of rational argument, emotion, and repetition also differed in terms of audience. Specifically, respondents were more likely to use rational appeals in upward dissent messages and more likely to display emotions in lateral dissent messages. Respondents were also more likely to repeat their dissatisfaction to coworkers rather than supervisors. However, there were some message types that were used relatively evenly across audience. These included requests for information and recalling events.

Having discussed message types by audience, the next step is to examine the effect that quality of relationship has on message type. Table 16 displays the crosstabulation of message types expressed to supervisors with various levels of quality of relationship. A chi square test for these message types yielded a score of 46.421, which was not statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

Table 15

*Cross-tabulation between Message Type and Audience for Surveys*

| Message Type            | Audience |            | Total |
|-------------------------|----------|------------|-------|
|                         | Coworker | Supervisor |       |
| Asking for Information  | 105      | 103        | 208   |
| Assertiveness           | 2        | 18         | 20    |
| Coalitions              | 32       | 2          | 34    |
| Display Emotions        | 37       | 19         | 56    |
| Exchange                | 0        | 1          | 1     |
| Ingratiation            | 1        | 4          | 5     |
| Rational Arguments      | 16       | 26         | 42    |
| Recall Events           | 14       | 37         | 51    |
| Sanctions               | 5        | 1          | 6     |
| Solution Presentation   | 11       | 40         | 51    |
| Threatening Resignation | 1        | 5          | 6     |
| Upward Appeal           | 1        | 12         | 13    |
| <i>Total</i>            | 225      | 268        | 493   |

Table 16

*Message Types Expressed to Supervisors by Quality of Relationship in Interviews*

| Message Type            | Quality of Relationship |     |        |           | Total |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----|--------|-----------|-------|
|                         | High                    | Low | Medium | Uncertain |       |
| Asking for Information  | 2                       |     | 3      |           | 5     |
| Assertiveness           | 2                       | 1   | 2      |           | 5     |
| Coalitions              |                         |     | 2      |           | 2     |
| Display Emotion         | 2                       |     | 1      |           | 3     |
| Humor                   | 1                       | 1   |        |           | 2     |
| Ingratiation            |                         | 1   |        |           | 1     |
| Rational Argument       |                         | 1   | 4      | 3         | 8     |
| Recall Events           | 3                       |     |        |           | 3     |
| Sanctions               |                         | 1   |        |           | 1     |
| Solution Presentation   | 1                       | 2   | 3      | 1         | 7     |
| Threatening Resignation | 3                       |     |        |           | 3     |
| Upward Appeal           | 4                       | 2   | 3      |           | 9     |
| Total                   | 18                      | 9   | 18     | 4         | 49    |

In the same way, Table 17 displays the crosstabulation of message types expressed to supervisors with various levels of quality of relationship for the survey responses. Chi-square results for this test yielded a value of 23.364 which was not significant at  $p < .05$ , which suggests that messages expressed to supervisors did not vary in the survey responses as a function of the quality of relationship with the supervisor. Thus, in both the interview and the survey, the quality of relationship with supervisor did not have a significant effect on the type of message used in upward dissent.

Table 17

*Message Types Expressed to Supervisors by Quality of Relationship in Surveys*

| Message Type            | Quality of Relationship |     |        | Total |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----|--------|-------|
|                         | High                    | Low | Medium |       |
| Asking for Information  | 33                      | 38  | 32     | 103   |
| Assertiveness           | 7                       | 8   | 3      | 18    |
| Coalitions              | 0                       | 1   | 1      | 2     |
| Display Emotions        | 8                       | 6   | 5      | 19    |
| Exchange                | 0                       | 0   | 1      | 1     |
| Ingratiation            | 0                       | 1   | 3      | 4     |
| Rational Arguments      | 7                       | 8   | 11     | 26    |
| Recall Events           | 15                      | 11  | 11     | 37    |
| Sanctions               | 1                       | 0   | 0      | 1     |
| Solution Presentation   | 14                      | 9   | 17     | 40    |
| Threatening Resignation | 2                       | 0   | 3      | 5     |
| Upward Appeal           | 5                       | 6   | 1      | 12    |
| <i>Total</i>            | 92                      | 88  | 88     | 268   |

The third research question examined coworker audiences and quality of relationships in much the same way. Table 18 displays the crosstabulation of message types expressed to coworkers with various levels of quality of relationship. The chi



square test for this crosstabulation yielded a score of 24.113, which was not statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

Table 18

*Message Types Expressed to Coworkers by Quality of Relationship in Interviews*

| Message Type           | Quality of Relationship |     |        |           | Total |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-----|--------|-----------|-------|
|                        | High                    | Low | Medium | Uncertain |       |
| Asking for Information | 2                       |     |        |           | 2     |
| Assertiveness          |                         | 1   |        |           | 1     |
| Coalitions             | 5                       |     | 3      |           | 8     |
| Display Emotion        | 10                      | 1   | 2      | 1         | 14    |
| Rational Argument      | 1                       |     | 1      |           | 2     |
| Recall Events          | 5                       |     | 1      | 1         | 7     |
| Solution Presentation  | 1                       |     |        |           | 1     |
| Total                  | 25                      | 2   | 7      | 2         | 35    |

Similarly, Table 19 displays the crosstabulation of message types expressed to coworkers with various levels of quality of relationship. A chi-square value of 19.685 for this test was not statistically significant at  $p > .05$ . Thus, results in both the interview and survey portions of the research indicated that the quality of relationship with coworker did not interview message type in lateral dissent.

In summary, organizational dissenters express different messages to supervisors than they do to coworkers. In this research, messages to supervisors were more likely to involve assertiveness, rational arguments, and solution presentation while messages to coworkers were more likely to involve coalition formation and display of emotions. However, in both the interview and survey portions of this research, dissent messages

did not vary according to the quality of relationship between the dissenter and the audience, whether that audience is a supervisor or coworker.

Table 19

*Message Types Expressed to Coworkers by Quality of Relationship in Surveys*

| Message Type            | Quality of Relationship |     |        | Total |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----|--------|-------|
|                         | High                    | Low | Medium |       |
| Asking for Information  | 32                      | 42  | 31     | 105   |
| Assertiveness           | 1                       | 0   | 1      | 2     |
| Coalitions              | 10                      | 12  | 10     | 32    |
| Display Emotions        | 15                      | 12  | 10     | 37    |
| Ingratiation            | 1                       | 0   | 0      | 1     |
| Rational Arguments      | 6                       | 5   | 5      | 16    |
| Recall Events           | 6                       | 4   | 4      | 14    |
| Sanctions               | 2                       | 2   | 1      | 5     |
| Solution Presentation   | 7                       | 3   | 1      | 11    |
| Threatening Resignation | 0                       | 0   | 1      | 1     |
| Upward Appeal           | 0                       | 1   | 0      | 1     |
| <i>Total</i>            | 80                      | 81  | 64     | 225   |

### *Goals*

Research questions four and five addressed influence goals and how those goals might affect dissent messages. Research question four asked which goals were significant in dissent interactions. During the interviews, participants were asked why they said what they said to express dissent, and those responses were coded by the research assistants. Table 20 shows the frequencies of each goal in messages to supervisors and to coworkers.

Confidence intervals of the percentages of occurrence of each message type plus or minus three standard errors indicate overlap for most of the percentages of

occurrences. Express emotion was significantly more prevalent than relational resource, get advice, provide guidance, and interaction.

Table 20

*Goal Frequencies for Interviews*

| Goal                | Occurrence to Supervisor | Occurrence to Coworker | Total Occurrences |
|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Express Emotion     | 11                       | 29                     | 40                |
| Change Opinion      | 12                       | 2                      | 14                |
| Change Behavior     | 22                       | 1                      | 23                |
| Gain Assistance     | 14                       | 5                      | 19                |
| Provide Guidance    | 5                        | 0                      | 5                 |
| Get Advice          | 2                        | 2                      | 4                 |
| Obtain Information  | 8                        | 13                     | 21                |
| Identity            | 6                        | 2                      | 8                 |
| Interaction         | 4                        | 2                      | 6                 |
| Personal Resource   | 11                       | 3                      | 14                |
| Relational Resource | 1                        | 2                      | 3                 |
| Arousal Management  | 4                        | 3                      | 7                 |

Differences between goals expressed to supervisors and coworkers were tested using chi-squared tests. Five goals—express emotion ( $\chi^2 = 28.846$ ), change opinion ( $\chi^2 = 5.224$ ), change behavior ( $\chi^2 = 18.154$ ), provide guidance ( $\chi^2 = 3.822$ ), and obtain information ( $\chi^2 = 4.587$ )—showed statistically significant differences between their use for the two audiences at  $p < .05$ . Thus, in the interviews, respondents were more likely to have the goal of expressing emotion and obtaining information when expressing dissent to a coworker, and more likely to have the goals of changing opinion, changing behavior, and providing guidance when expressing dissent to a supervisor.

Survey items were combined to form subscales that measured each of the goals described earlier in this dissertation. Those items that were originally part of “Change Behavior” and “Gain Assistance” were analyzed separately because of poor alpha reliability scores. Table 21 lists the means and standard deviations for those subscales.

Confidence intervals of three standard errors were considered around each mean and change behavior...audience and Personal Resources were considered significantly less often than other goals. Provide Guidance, Arousal Management, and Change Opinion were also considered significantly less often than other goals as dissenters approached conversations with their supervisors or coworkers. Identity was reported as being considered significantly more often than other goals.

An independent samples t-test indicates significant differences between supervisors and coworkers on goals of Change Opinion ( $t = 5.755$ ), Interaction ( $t = 3.128$ ), receiving assistance ( $t = 5.644$ ), and change behavior...audience ( $t = 2.404$ ). That is, goals of changing opinion, changing behavior, gaining assistance, and interaction were associated with supervisor audiences. Thus, employees may feel that supervisors may be in more of a position to change the situation causing dissatisfaction and so goals of changing opinion, changing behavior, and gaining assistance motivated messages expressed to supervisors. Additionally, because supervisors occupy a higher organizational position, dissenters were more aware of what was appropriate and what was inappropriate for those interactions.

The final research question sought to link messages and goals. Table 22 shows the cross-tabulation of messages with goals for the interview data. There were

significant differences in messages based on goals for express emotion, change opinion, change behavior, gain assistance, get advice, and obtain information as shown in chi-square values. These significant chi square values indicated that those goals motivated particular messages. Post hoc analysis showed that the goal of expressing emotion was more likely to motivate messages of displaying emotion than assertiveness.

Table 21

*Goal Subscale Means and Standard Deviations*

| Goal                       | Mean(Standard Dev.) to Supervisor | Mean(S. D.) to Coworker | Total Mean (S. D.) |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Express Emotion            | 3.53 (.89)                        | 3.59 (.82)              | 3.55 (.86)         |
| Change Opinion             | 3.15 (1.05)                       | 2.67 (1.02)             | 2.92 (1.06)        |
| build support              | 3.99 (1.01)                       | 3.84 (1.06)             | 3.92 (1.03)        |
| receive assistance         | 3.78 (.97)                        | 3.32 (1.04)             | 3.56 (1.03)        |
| change behavior...audience | 2.53 (1.18)                       | 2.30 (1.15)             | 2.42 (1.17)        |
| change behavior...cause    | 3.42 (1.31)                       | 3.37 (1.25)             | 3.40 (1.28)        |
| Provide Guidance           | 2.79 (.97816)                     | 2.77 (1.10)             | 2.78 (1.04)        |
| Get Advice                 | 3.71 (.80322)                     | 3.67 (.78)              | 3.69 (.79)         |
| Obtain Information         | 3.88 (.91727)                     | 3.81 (.92)              | 3.85 (.92)         |
| Identity                   | 4.29 (.66279)                     | 4.21 (.71)              | 4.25 (.68)         |
| Interaction                | 3.98 (.73039)                     | 3.80 (.75)              | 3.89 (.74)         |
| Personal Resource          | 2.40 (.83584)                     | 2.43 (.84)              | 2.41 (.84)         |
| Relational Resource        | 3.57 (.77596)                     | 3.62 (.79)              | 3.60 (.78)         |
| Arousal Management         | 2.90 (.84971)                     | 2.84 (.84)              | 2.87 (.84)         |

Table 22

*Cross-tabulation of Goals and Messages*

|                      | Express<br>Emotion | Change<br>Opinion | Change<br>Behav. | Gain<br>Assis. | Provide<br>Guid. | Get<br>Advice | Obtain<br>Info | Identity      | Interact      | Person<br>Res. | Relation<br>Res. | Arousal<br>Mngmt |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Asking for<br>Info   | 2                  |                   |                  | 1              |                  | 4             | 5              | 2             |               | 1              | 1                | 1                |
| Assert               | 1                  |                   | 5                | 1              | 2                |               |                |               |               | 2              |                  |                  |
| Coalition            | 6                  | 1                 |                  | 5              | 1                |               | 6              | 1             | 1             |                |                  | 2                |
| Display<br>Emotion   | 16                 | 1                 | 1                | 1              |                  |               | 3              |               |               | 3              |                  | 1                |
| Humor                |                    | 1                 | 2                |                |                  |               |                |               | 1             | 1              | 1                |                  |
| Ingratiation         |                    |                   |                  |                |                  |               |                |               |               |                |                  |                  |
| Rational<br>Argue    |                    | 6                 | 3                |                |                  |               | 1              | 4             | 3             | 1              | 1                | 1                |
| Recall Events        | 8                  | 1                 | 1                | 2              |                  |               | 2              |               |               | 2              |                  | 1                |
| Sanction             |                    |                   |                  |                |                  |               | 1              |               |               |                |                  |                  |
| Solution<br>Present. | 2                  | 1                 | 6                |                | 2                |               | 2              | 1             |               | 1              |                  |                  |
| Threaten             |                    |                   |                  |                |                  |               |                |               |               |                |                  |                  |
| Resign               | 2                  | 2                 | 1                | 2              |                  |               | 1              |               |               | 1              |                  |                  |
| Upward<br>Appeal     | 2                  | 1                 | 3                | 7              |                  |               |                |               | 1             | 2              |                  | 1                |
| Chi- Square<br>p     | 40.08<br>.000      | 26.78<br>.008     | 37.81<br>.000    | 33.98<br>.001  | 17.82<br>.121    | 47.35<br>.000 | 26.58<br>.009  | 19.58<br>.075 | 18.38<br>.105 | 7.06<br>.853   | 18.96<br>.090    | 4.59<br>.970     |

To consider the relationship between goals and messages in the survey data, a series of univariate analyses of variance was performed. These analyses indicated that there were significant differences in message types for several goals—provide guidance, change opinion, interaction, relational resource, and receive assistance from supervisor/coworker. Tables 23-27 show the F tables for those goals with significant differences in message types.

Table 23

*Analysis of Variance for Provide Guidance*

| Source          | Type III Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F        | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-----|-------------|----------|------|---------------------|
| Corrected Model | 32.166                  | 10  | 3.217       | 3.305    | .000 | .064                |
| Intercept       | 1327.907                | 1   | 1327.907    | 1364.243 | .000 | .740                |
| MESSAGE         | 32.166                  | 10  | 3.217       | 3.305    | .000 | .064                |
| Error           | 467.216                 | 480 | .973        |          |      |                     |
| Total           | 4280.250                | 491 |             |          |      |                     |
| Corrected Total | 499.382                 | 490 |             |          |      |                     |

a R Squared = .064 (Adjusted R Squared = .045)

Table 24

*Analysis of Variance for Change Opinion*

| Source          | Type III Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F        | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-----|-------------|----------|------|---------------------|
| Corrected Model | 28.979                  | 10  | 2.898       | 2.697    | .003 | .053                |
| Intercept       | 1434.413                | 1   | 1434.413    | 1334.745 | .000 | .736                |
| MESSAGE         | 28.979                  | 10  | 2.898       | 2.697    | .003 | .053                |
| Error           | 515.842                 | 480 | 1.075       |          |      |                     |
| Total           | 4877.250                | 491 |             |          |      |                     |
| Corrected Total | 544.822                 | 490 |             |          |      |                     |

a R Squared = .053 (Adjusted R Squared = .033)

Table 25

*Analysis of Variance for Interaction*

| Source          | Type III Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F        | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-----|-------------|----------|------|---------------------|
| Corrected Model | 10.563                  | 10  | 1.056       | 2.019    | .030 | .040                |
| Intercept       | 2194.280                | 1   | 2194.280    | 4194.626 | .000 | .897                |
| MESSAGE         | 10.563                  | 10  | 1.056       | 2.019    | .030 | .040                |
| Error           | 251.096                 | 480 | .523        |          |      |                     |
| Total           | 7851.944                | 491 |             |          |      |                     |
| Corrected Total | 261.659                 | 490 |             |          |      |                     |

a. R Squared = .040 (Adjusted R Squared = .020)

Table 26

*Analysis of Variance for Relational Resource*

| Source          | Type III Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F        | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-----|-------------|----------|------|---------------------|
| Corrected Model | 24.874                  | 10  | 2.487       | 4.296    | .000 | .082                |
| Intercept       | 1736.799                | 1   | 1736.799    | 2999.521 | .000 | .862                |
| MESSAGE         | 24.874                  | 10  | 2.487       | 4.296    | .000 | .082                |
| Error           | 277.932                 | 480 | .579        |          |      |                     |
| Total           | 6783.583                | 491 |             |          |      |                     |
| Corrected Total | 302.807                 | 490 |             |          |      |                     |

a. R Squared = .082 (Adjusted R Squared = .063)



Table 27

*Analysis of Variance for Receive Assistance from Supervisor/Coworker*

| Source          | Type III Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F        | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-----|-------------|----------|------|---------------------|
| Corrected Model | 23.014                  | 10  | 2.301       | 2.289    | .013 | .046                |
| Intercept       | 1891.002                | 1   | 1891.002    | 1880.979 | .000 | .798                |
| MESSAGE         | 23.014                  | 10  | 2.301       | 2.289    | .013 | .046                |
| Error           | 479.542                 | 477 | 1.005       |          |      |                     |
| Total           | 6771.000                | 488 |             |          |      |                     |
| Corrected Total | 502.555                 | 487 |             |          |      |                     |

a. R Squared = .046 (Adjusted R Squared = .026)

Tukey post hoc analyses revealed significant differences between messages of asking for information and solution presentation for the goals of Provide Guidance and Change Opinion such that if an employee's goal was to provide guidance or change someone's opinion, that employee was more likely to present a solution rather than ask for information. Post hoc analyses also revealed significant differences between messages of threatening resignation and asking for information, coalitions, displaying emotions, rational arguments, recalling events, and solution presentation for the goal of relational resource, meaning that if the goal of relational resource is placing bounds on how an employee expresses dissent, that employee is less likely to use messages of threatening resignation, but instead may ask for information, attempt to form coalitions, display emotions, make a rational argument, recall events, or present a solution. Finally, there were significant differences between messages of recalling events and coalitions for the survey item of receiving assistance from supervisor/coworker. Surprisingly, if a dissenter approaches a conversation with a supervisor or coworker with the goal of

receiving assistance in regard to the dissent trigger, the dissenter is more likely to recall events that cause dissatisfaction rather than attempting to form a coalition with the audience.

### *Summary of Chapter III*

This chapter has presented the results of analyses on data gathered as part of this dissertation, organized by each of the research questions. The first research question examined message used to express organizational dissent, and several message types were found to be more predominant than other message types in a distribution that differed from what one might expect by chance. Research questions two and three examined organizational dissent messages in terms of audience and the quality of the relationship between dissenter and audience. Significant differences were seen in messages used to supervisor versus coworkers such that messages of rational argument, humor, ingratiation, sanctions, solution presentation, threatening resignation, and upward appeal were more prevalent in upward dissent, and messages of coalitions and displaying emotion were more prevalent in lateral dissent. However, there were no statistically significant differences in messages based on quality of relationship. The fourth research question examined the goals that motivated organizational dissent, and results indicated differences between goals based on audience, such that goals of expressing emotion and obtaining information tended to motivate lateral dissent and goals of changing opinion, changing behavior, receiving assistance, providing guidance, and interaction goals tended to motivate upward dissent. Finally, research question five linked influence goals to specific message types used in organizational dissent. Interview results showed

significant differences in messages for goals of express emotion, change opinion, change behavior, gain assistance, get advice, and obtain information. Survey results showed significant differences in messages of provide guidance, change opinion, interaction, relational resource, and receive assistance, such that goals of providing guidance and changing opinion were more associated with messages of solution presentation rather than asking for information, the goal of relational resource was less associated with threatening resignation than most other messages, and the goal of receiving assistance was more associated with recalling events rather than coalitions. The next chapter discusses these results in light of previous scholarship and argues for the significance of these findings.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research reviewed and results considered in previous chapters indicate that organizational dissent messages can be characterized as interpersonal influence. Such messages, whether to supervisors or coworkers, are motivated by influence goals within the bounds of certain secondary goals. The research presented in this dissertation demonstrates that organizational dissenters' choices of message types varied based on the dissent audience and on the goal or goals motivating the dissent. Scholars have made a convincing argument that a variety of triggers that might cause dissent as well and that dissatisfaction might be expressed to a number of different audiences. However, there has been little work exploring the specific content of dissent messages, and little research considering dissent messages directed at coworkers. Additionally, there has been little work exploring the nature of dissent goals and connecting those primary and secondary goals to the content of dissent messages. This study was conducted to address those gaps.

The literature examined here illustrates that a multitude of goals could serve to motivate messages of dissent, but theoretical frames examining the ways in which both influence goals and relationships affect dissent messages are strangely absent from research examining organizational dissent. The research questions investigated in this dissertation focused on organizational dissent message types, supervisor and coworker dissent audiences, and influence goals. More specifically, this research examined dissent messages and how those messages can be conceptualized as interpersonal

influence in organizational contexts. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results of this study, provide general conclusions based on these analyses, and address the study's limitations. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the pragmatic implications of this line of research for organizations and directions for future research.

### *Dissent Messages*

The first question addressed in this study examined the types of messages used in organizational dissent. The results indicated that the distribution of message types differed from what one might expect by chance, indicating that the choice of how to express dissent is based on more than a random selection of messages and further supporting the idea that message production is based on purposeful goals. Frequently used message types included asking for information, displaying emotion, solution presentation, and recalling events, all of which may be seen as less confrontational than other dissent options. That is, these message types either do not specifically ask the audience to do anything about the dissent trigger or suggest an alternative for the dissent trigger. Several messages were less frequently used such as sanctions or threatening resignation. These threats of negative action may be used less frequently because of a positive bias on the part of the dissenter—that is, individuals may have the primary hope of changing things for the better. Alternatively, these more negatively valenced dissent message may be avoided because of a fear of retribution on the part of the dissenter. Messages of exchange and ingratiation were also less frequently used, particularly in the surveys. It is possible that such tactics of misdirection or enforcing obligations are seen

as underhanded or manipulative and hence are used less frequently in organizational dissent situations.

As discussed in an earlier chapter, Kassing's (2002) strategies of upward dissent were part of the starting point for examining messages of dissent in this study.

Kassing's idea of messages of repetition was seen in the interviews as participants described repeating messages of dissatisfaction to both audiences, but particularly to supervisors. Solution presentation, another of Kassing's tactics, was a common message type in both interviews and surveys. On the other hand, threatening resignation was not a common strategy in either context. The message types of upward appeal and rational arguments were commonly found in both Kassing's study and in Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980), although Kassing labeled them circumvention and direct-factual appeal, respectively. Both message types were common in dissent discussed in interviews, but survey respondents were less likely to use upward appeal. This difference could be attributable to survey respondents being uncertain as to whether such circumvention was possible or appropriate versus interview participants who were more familiar with the organizational context and the specific dissent situation. Other strategies that Kipnis et al. identified included assertiveness, coalitions, sanctions, blocking, asking for information, exchange, and ingratiation, and all of these were seen in the data.

In this research, survey responses more often included strategies for information gathering. This distinction from the interview results could be attributed to survey participants needing more information about the hypothetical scenario, while interview

participants were describing situations with which they were more personally familiar. That is, it is possible that this finding is an artifact of data collection techniques. Interview respondents also used fewer direct messages, instead preferring more indirect strategies such as humor, ingratiation, and upward appeals. This also could be because of their familiarity with the situation and with their supervisor or coworkers. Indirect strategies might also be preferable to interview participants because they probably perceive more at stake than those participants who are responding to hypothetical situations. Ten of the 84 messages coded in the interview transcripts involved repetition, repeating a message. However, none of the survey respondents reported repeating their message. Again, this could be attributed to the hypothetical nature of the scenarios on the survey or to participants not feeling any long-term investment in the situation.

These results, in answering the first research question, emphasize the importance of a consideration of messages in organizational communication, and particularly in dissent research. Employees are using a variety of verbal strategies to express dissent and those messages are important to understand. Critical theory has explored the various strategies associated with more covert forms of resistance (Murphy, 1998; Ong, 1997), and this study contributes to dissent research by further clarifying the specific verbal strategies that are available for direct dissent, a more overt form of resistance. Future research would benefit from a more prescriptive stance, examining which of these message types are most effective in voicing dissent and which message types may lead to more satisfying outcomes for dissenters.

### *Audience and Dissent*

The second and third research questions addressed audience and dissent. Results showed that messages differed based on audience, but not based on quality of the relationship between the dissenter and the audience. There were no significant differences in audience for messages of “asking for information” and “recalling events.” Messages of “assertiveness,” “rational arguments,” “solution presentation,” “humor,” “ingratiation,” “repetition,” “sanctions,” “threatening resignation,” and “upward appeal” were expressed more to supervisors than to coworkers. Several of these findings make sense intuitively. Messages of upward appeal were, by definition, those made to someone higher in the organizational hierarchy. Messages of humor and ingratiation are more indirect messages and perhaps are used in instances where direct confrontation regarding a dissent trigger may not be appropriate, and such instances may be more likely to occur in conversations with supervisors rather than with coworkers. Because supervisors may be more likely to actually change the dissent trigger, one might expect messages that suggest negative consequences should the audience fail to comply such as sanctions and threatening resignation to be more prevalent in upward dissent rather than lateral dissent as well as messages that present solutions to the problems causing dissatisfaction.

Perhaps not as predictably, messages of assertiveness and rational arguments were also significantly more prevalent in messages expressed to supervisors. It seems possible that these two messages may be sides of the same coin, where rational arguments is akin to demanding compliance from a supervisor based on logical premises



while assertiveness might be considered demanding compliance based on an obligation on the part of the supervisor. Given these dimensions, it seems reasonable to consider solution presentation and ingratiation as potentially related to recalling events in that they may also involve logical appeals. Sanctions, blocking, threatening resignation, and exchange might also be similar to assertiveness in suggesting that the supervisor has an obligation to address the dissent trigger. The fact that these messages were more prevalent in addressing supervisors suggests the pragmatic nature of dissent and respondents understanding of the power inherent in the organizational hierarchy. That is, when expressing dissent to supervisors, a variety of appeal strategies (obligation, logic) are presented as this is the individual who has the resources to affect change in the situation.

In contrast to those messages expressed to supervisors, “display emotion” and “coalitions” were message types that were expressed more in lateral dissent than in upward dissent. As dissenters express frustrations or dissatisfactions to coworkers in messages that “display emotions,” they are forming what could become common ground for a social connection, perhaps enhancing understanding between the two individuals. Messages of coalitions then build on that understanding, asking the coworker to support the dissenter emotionally or instrumentally, suggesting that lateral dissent may play an important role in workplace relationships between coworkers. This is consistent with previous work on complaining in the workplace, which suggests that such communication can serve to alleviate societal and organizational pressures by involving coworkers in connections at work (Sotirin & Gottfried, 1999). In these ways, lateral

dissent functions not only as venting, a type of “safety valve,” but also as an alternative “backstage” discourse, a foundation of potential change to come (Murphy, 1998; Scott, 1990).

The message types associated with each audience in this study indicate that employees use upward dissent more for changing their situation and lateral dissent more for emotional support. The results of this dissertation are particularly consistent with literature on social support, which argues that employees use support from supervisors and coworkers for different purposes (Ray, 1987). Dissenters used messages of asking for information and recalling events (which could be considered “providing information”) for both audiences, messages seeking change (instrumental support) for supervisor audiences, and messages seeking emotional support for coworkers.

In several respects, this is consistent with Kassing’s research program on dissent audience. Kassing and Avtgis (2001) found that employees with an internal locus of control were more likely to express dissent to their supervisors, while those with an external locus of control were more likely to resort to lateral dissent. It is not unreasonable to think that employees with a more internal locus of control would express more messages to change situations causing them dissatisfaction than those employees with a more external locus of control. On the other hand, employees with a more external locus of control would certainly be more likely to vent to others rather than try to change the situation because they would likely perceive their change efforts to be futile. Given these ideas, it is not surprising that messages to supervisors were more likely to revolve around changing the situation and messages to coworkers were

more likely to center on support. These results are also consistent with Kassing and Avtgis's (1999) study on verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness, where employees who were more argumentative were more likely to use upward dissent in that messages such as rational arguments, solution presentation, and assertiveness were expressed more to supervisors, and these messages seem to embody many of the ideas of argumentativeness, the tendency to enter into arguments.

The consideration of a coworker audience alongside of a supervisor audience for dissent is an important contribution, recognizing that expressing dissatisfaction to supervisors only accounts for part of the dissent picture and answering Teboul and Cole's (2005) criticism of organizational communication research that neglects the coworker relationship. Kassing's (2002) strategies were observed in upward dissent, and four of those strategies were more prevalent in upward dissent than in lateral dissent. Only repetition was seen more to coworkers. Kipnis et al. (1980) argued that tactics such as assertiveness, sanctions, ingratiation, and rational arguments were used in influence situations with subordinates, coworkers, and supervisors, suggesting that such tactics would be associated with both lateral and upward dissent. Kipnis et al. further stated that messages of exchange, blocking, and upward appeals were associated with upward influence and coalitions were primarily used for subordinate audiences. In contrast, the results of this study showed messages of assertiveness, sanctions, ingratiation, and rational arguments were used primarily for upward dissent rather than all audiences.

It is interesting that in a number of interviews, as employees discussed lateral dissent, they often reported feeling guilty or ashamed of their choice of audience, as if they were “talking behind someone’s back.” Several participants seemed to equate lateral dissent with gossip, particularly when it directly involved dissenting about a supervisor’s actions (rather than a more general policy). For example, one participant described latent dissent and then added, “I feel bad because I’m not one to gossip, that was one of the big drawbacks to where I used to work. We had some real big cat fights, switching around of schedules, people had to change locations because of it.” Another talked about lateral dissent regarding a supervisor and said, “I mean if you’re going to say something, say something to the person that’s causing the problem. Backstabbing, talking bad about them if it gets back to them creates more problems, doesn’t change or improve anything.” One participant began a description of lateral dissent with “Yes, not to say I talked behind people’s back or I am backstabbing anyone, but there are times when I can talk to another [worker].” Those respondents discussed how they did not like to gossip, but expressed lateral dissent in spite of their guilty feelings. Tracy (2005) argued that organizational norms discouraged emotional support between correctional officers, and it is possible that a societal norm against lateral dissent may cause employees to feel guilty for seeking support from coworkers. Sotirin and Gottfried (1999) identified ‘bitching’ as related to gossip, and it could be that lateral dissent is also related. More research is needed to clarify the distinctions between workplace gossip and lateral dissent.

Previous work had indicated that quality of relationship affected communication in organizations (Sias, Krone, & Jablin, 2002) and specifically the choice of audience (Kassing, 2000a; Krone, 1992) in upward influence and dissent situations. Given that literature and the fact that the choice of audience did influence message type in this study, it was not unreasonable to expect a difference in messages based on quality of relationship, but that was not the case in these data. There were no significant differences in message types based on quality of relationship with either a supervisor or a coworker audience and those results were consistent in both the interviews and the surveys. One possible explanation for this with regard to upward dissent is that it does not matter how close an employee feels toward a supervisor; he or she is still a supervisor. In essence, this suggests that organizational position or status may trump relational closeness in matters of dissent. For either audience, it is possible that the magnitude of the trigger is responsible for the lack of differences based on quality of relationship in that if an offense is important enough for an employee to express dissent, that expression matters more than the quality of relationship the dissenter has with the audience. At any rate, these data indicate that relational distinctions in the workplace were not as important as positional structure in influencing dissent message production.

The data in this dissertation indicate that dissent messages vary according to dissent audience, but not in response to the quality of relationship between the dissenter and the audience. These results also highlight the importance of considering coworker audiences in dissent research. Messages expressed to supervisors differed from messages expressed to coworkers, and coworkers may often be the audience for dissent,

which means that by only considering upward dissent, previous research has missed an important distinction. Future researchers need to attend to both supervisor and coworker audiences in examining workplace influence in general and dissent specifically.

### *Dissent and Influence Goals*

Research question four asked what types of goals were most important for employees who expressed dissent. Several goals were prominent in both interview and survey responses. In both phases of this dissertation, participants were motivated by goals of obtaining information and gaining assistance, while goals of providing guidance, personal resource, relational resource, and arousal management were less dominant. These goals of obtaining information and gaining assistance highlight the instrumental benefits of dissent as well as suggesting benefits that dissenters may see in expressing dissent even when they may not succeed in changing the dissatisfying situation itself. Goals that were less prevalent indicate differences between interpersonal communication in the workplace and interpersonal communication in romantic relationships. That is, the secondary goals related to relational maintenance did not appear to be as critical in the organizational setting.

Other goals differed in their predominance in interviews versus surveys. Interview participants were motivated by goals of expressing emotion and changing behavior, yet those goals were not as dominant in surveys. On the other hand, survey respondents were more motivated by goals of get advice, identity, and interaction while those goals were rarely found in interviews. Because interview participants are more intimately familiar with the situation that they are describing versus survey participants

who are responding to a hypothetical situation, they may feel more emotionally invested in expressing dissent and more concerned with changing the behavior of the person or person(s) they perceive as responsible for their dissatisfaction. Because survey participants might be more detached from the scenario triggering the dissent, they may be able to reflect on social appropriateness and on being true to their values, a luxury that someone “in the heat of the moment” might not feel. On the other hand, it could also be that interview participants do not think about identity and interaction as goals motivating their expressions of dissent in a conscious way and therefore do not list that among the goals that motivate their dissent while survey participants are able to respond to specific questions that tap into issues of identity and interaction. In other words, this finding might be an artifact of the distinction between the free response format of the interviews versus the forced choice format of the surveys.

Regarding secondary goals, participants, particularly those responding to the survey, indicated that identity was an important goal as they approached the conversation with their supervisor or coworker. This finding, coupled with the relatively low scores of personal resource, relational resource, and arousal management in both interview and survey results, suggests that being true to themselves and their values is often more important to dissenters than protecting themselves or not feeling anxious. This provides support for Graham’s (1986) concept of Principled Dissent, in which dissenters express dissatisfaction for reasons of justice, honesty, or organizational benefit.

Unexpectedly, Dillard's et al. (1989) secondary goals did not have high reliability. In Dillard's et al. original report of their scale on secondary goals, each goal had an alpha score above 0.7, so it was surprising that secondary goals did not have higher reliability in these data. This may indicate that secondary goals function differently in organizational dissent than they were seen to function in interpersonal communication. Dillard et al. (1989) argued that secondary goals place bounds on what message choices are available, and given the data in this study, it seems possible that dissenters do not feel that their message choices are significantly constrained by much other than identity concerns. The lack of significant differences in messages based on quality of relationship supports the idea that relational concerns may not constrain dissent messages, and if it is true that secondary goals do not affect dissent messages in the same way as other interpersonal conversations, it represents a marked departure from romantic relationships. When these results are considered in light of the contrasting results of Waldron (1991) who argued that relationship maintenance would be a prevalent goal in workplace communication, more research is needed to examine the role of relational concerns in dissent. These results indicate that once dissenters have chosen an audience for expressing dissatisfaction, other factors regarding appropriateness may not be taken into account.

In both interviews and surveys, there were significant differences in goals based on dissent audience in that goals of changing opinion and changing behavior tended to characterize dissent expressed to supervisors. This is not surprising in that most participants probably believed that their best chance at change rested in expressing



dissent to someone with a higher position in the organization. Additionally, survey responses indicate that goals of gaining assistance and interaction may motivate upward dissent. The importance of interaction goals in upward dissent is not surprising and further supports the idea that dissenters are keenly aware of their supervisor's status in spite of any relational closeness that exists in their relationship, given that they are concerned with what may be appropriate in such an interaction. Gaining assistance as a goal in upward dissent is more surprising in some ways in that one might expect employees to turn to coworkers for help in coping with dissatisfying situations, but it is also possible that dissenters feel that supervisors might be in better positions from which to render such assistance. In interview responses, goals of express emotion and obtain information tended to characterize dissent expressed to coworkers. Expressing emotions as a goal is certainly reflective of the idea of venting as an influence goal, and it makes a great deal of intuitive sense that such venting might be directed at organizational members of equal position. It is interesting to note that employees who want more information tend to seek that information from coworkers. Speaking to a coworker rather than a supervisor in order to find more information may serve to hide ignorance from supervisors and is consistent with work on information seeking during organizational socialization (Miller & Jablin, 1991).

#### *Linking Dissent Messages and Influence Goals*

The final research question attempted to connect influence goals with dissent messages. Based on previous research (Berger, 2002; Dillard, 1990a, Dillard et al., 2002, Kipnis et al., 1980, O'Keefe & Shepherd, 1987), it was expected that message

types would vary based on influence goal. The interview data revealed significant differences in messages based on goals of express emotions, change opinions, change behavior, gain assistance, get advice, and obtain information. Provide guidance was the only primary goal that did not show significant differences in message types in interviews. Not surprisingly, post hoc analysis showed that the goal of expressing emotion was more likely to be associated with messages of displaying emotion than assertiveness. Similarly, survey data revealed significant differences in messages based on goals of change opinion and gain assistance, as well as provide guidance, interaction, and relational resource. Post hoc analysis suggested that goals of providing guidance and changing opinion were significantly more associated with solution presentation than with asking for information, the goal of relational resource was significantly more associated with messages of asking for information, coalitions, displaying emotions, rational arguments, recalling events, and solution presentation than with messages threatening resignation, and the goal of gaining assistance was significantly more associated with coalitions than with recalling events. In other words, if a dissenter is hoping to provide guidance or change someone's opinion, he or she is more likely to present a solution than ask for information. If a dissenter is motivated to preserve the relationship while expressing dissent, that employee is unlikely to threaten to resign if the situation is not resolved. And if a dissenter is trying to gain the audience's assistance, the dissenter is more likely to use messages that encourage coalition building rather than simply recalling events. These findings seem intuitive, but they hold important implications for practice in that threats of resignation may be perceived as

doing significant damage to workplace relationships and simply recalling events may be perceived as ineffective for recruiting instrumental help.

The connections between goals and dissent messages builds important links between interpersonal influence theories and organizational dissent and generates an important response to Waldron's (1999) and Hegstrom's (1995) critique of the atheoretical nature of organizational dissent. Kassing (1997) argued that various individual, relational, and organizational variables contributed to a dissenter's choice of audience, and this study builds on that and other considerations of dissent to argue for a model where influence goals and audience are linked to dissent messages. Future theorizing can build on this model by clarifying the relationships between these factors, as well as examining the role that other variables such as workplace freedom of speech and perceived influence within the organization play in this model of dissent messages.

### *Directions for the Future, Limitations, and Conclusion*

#### *Directions for the Future*

As stated earlier, the results of this study indicate that position in the organization played more of a role in organizational dissent than did the quality of relationship between the dissenter and the audience. The organizational hierarchy structures much of workplace activity so it is not surprising that organizational dissent should vary as a function of position. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of dissent audience, but important questions remain regarding organizational structure and how hierarchical position affects organizational dissent.

Relatedly, future research could also benefit from further examinations of dissent triggers. This study purposely considered a variety of triggers in order to enhance the ecological validity of the results. It makes intuitive sense that such triggers may affect dissent messages. Specifically, it may be important to consider whether a supervisor is the target of dissent, that is, whether a supervisor's actions are directly part of the dissent trigger. In such a case, messages to that supervisor and perhaps even coworkers would likely be different from those in response to triggers regarding policies or other sources of dissatisfaction. More research is needed to examine differences in organizational dissent messages according to the types dissent triggers.

Finally, this line of research, along with much of the previous work on organizational dissent, has not considered much of the context of organizational culture. Organizational dissent research has examined the effect of elements of the workplace environment such as workplace freedom of speech and verbal aggression on dissent audience. Yet certainly the organizational culture would affect how employees express dissatisfaction. Future research needs to include components of context such as organizational culture.

### *Limitations*

Like any study, this dissertation had several limitations. As stated earlier, the hypothetical scenarios in the surveys were not as familiar to participants as the situations they described in their interviews, and so dissent in the surveys was often more about getting information than dissent expressed in the interviews. Additionally, because survey participants were less emotionally invested in those hypothetical situations than

interview participants who recount personal experiences, survey participants had the luxury of allowing principles and rules of appropriateness to motivate them versus interview participants in the “heat of the moment.” Future research would benefit from examinations based less on hypothetical dissent triggers and more on the actual experiences of participants.

The poor reliabilities—both in terms of some portions of the coding scheme and in terms of some of the multi-item scales in the survey—also represent a shortcoming of the present study. Obviously, low reliabilities introduce doubt regarding the consistency of the results, which also leads to doubts regarding the conclusions. The poor reliabilities associated with parts of this study were handled appropriately (e.g., through resolving disagreements through discussion for the coding and through treating particularly problematic scales as individual items), but further work would be useful in refining this instrument and the coding scheme to better assess the messages and goals associated with dissent. Higher reliabilities coupled with efforts to measure messages with interval data rather than nominal data would allow researchers the opportunity to more accurately examine dissent.

A final limitation regarding this dissertation revolves around the sampling itself. The method used to recruit participants ensured a cross-section of organizations and provided a wide variety of workplace environments. However, this effort to recruit participants in a wide array of organizational contexts came with tradeoffs. For example, the average age was only 26 with only 3 years of average tenure, which indicates that undergraduate college students often recruited other students, which was confirmed by

the high numbers of survey participants who reported “some college” as their education level. Such demographics cast some shadows on the representativeness of this sample in reflecting a general organizational population and limit the generalizeability of these conclusions in spite of the criteria placed on participants regarding full-time work in a particular organization. Additionally, despite the wide variety of workplace environments represented in this sample, there was little consideration of context in the survey results. Future research would be strengthened both by samples that better reflect organizational populations in general and by designs that capitalize on the context available in those populations.

In addition to those suggestions for future research stemming from weaknesses in the current methodology, several other directions are indicated by the results of this dissertation. One of the more interesting questions regarding dissent messages and goals is the issue of effectiveness. If one assumes that the goal for expressing dissent is always to change the organization, then effectiveness may be relatively easy to measure. On the other hand, if a researcher begins from the perspective that an assortment of multiple and potentially conflicting goals may underlie dissent, effectiveness then becomes a question of the achievement of those various objectives. More research is needed to examine conceptualizations of effectiveness and multiple goals for dissent messages.

### *Conclusion*

Future research could also benefit from examining how messages may be designed to serve multiple goals, particularly in situations where those goals conflict

with each other. For example, there may be times when an employee seeks to provide guidance or change someone's opinion but also fit with what messages are appropriate for the interaction. Research on message design logics (O'Keefe, 1988; 1990; 1997) has argued that communicators who are more cognitively complex are better able to design messages to meet multiple objectives, and a consideration of such conceptualizations might fine-tune the relationships between workplace goals and dissent messages. Additionally, it might be interesting to explore the effects of participating in research on dissent to better understand the study's effect on respondents. During the interviews for this dissertation, it certainly seemed like the participants experienced a cathartic release as someone was available who actually wanted to hear them complain about workplace issues. It is conceivable that such discussions made employees more aware of dissent and dissent triggers in the workplace and could then change the ways in which they approach dissent in the future.

This dissertation has argued that organizational dissent messages can be connected to various influence goals and that audience is an important consideration in organizational dissent. The results of this study indicate that organizational dissenters choose messages based upon the position of the person to whom they are talking and their goals for that particular conversation. It is my hope that this study provides a foundation for a continued study of dissent in organizations, a program looking at what messages are best suited for accomplishing employees' goals and under what conditions dissent can contribute to organizational effectiveness. Dissent is a common phenomenon in the workplace, something that may be inescapable in organizations. In

communication scholarship, dissent messages are particularly important, as employees express frustrations and disagreements with various parts of their job. This dissertation has served to fill our understanding of this relevant concept.



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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**I. Project Introduction.** Begin by explaining the purpose of the project. I am interested in seeing how people respond to situations in organizations where they disagree with their supervisor and/or other organizational imperatives and how they express that dissent. **HAVE INTERVIEWEE SIGN CONSENT FORMS.**

#### II. Short background

- Name of organization, job description.
- Tenure in that job/organization, what he/she did before.
- Daily responsibilities.
- Quality of relationship with supervisor and coworkers

**II. Let's explore some instances of when things aren't going according to what you might normally expect. Can you think of a time when you really disagreed with your supervisor or some organizational policy?**

- Describe an example.
- Who did you talk to about this instance?
- Why did you choose that particular person to talk to?
- What were you hoping to accomplish by talking to that person?
  - Probe for multiple goals
- What specifically did you say?
  - If the participant talked with a supervisor about this instance, I will probe for how they might answer these questions if they had talked to a coworker. If they talked to a coworker, I will probe for how they might answer these questions if they had talked to a supervisor.

**IV. Closing.** Those are all the questions that I have. Do you have anything to add, or is there anything that I missed that I really need to know about dissent in your organization or in your job?

## APPENDIX B

## TRIGGER SCENARIOS AND RELATIONSHIP DESCRIPTIONS

**Dissent Triggers**

## Preferential treatment

Someone in the department where you work has just been promoted ahead of everyone else. You believe that this person does not deserve this promotion because this employee is always late, rarely puts 100% into work, and often takes credit for the effort of others. You feel like you really need to do something, to tell someone about this problem.

## Overlooked ideas

For several months, you have been getting the feeling that your ideas are not being considered. When you and your coworkers present ideas to your boss, your ideas are never even considered in the final decision. You have just as much education as your coworkers, but you feel like you are being overlooked, and this could be damaging to your career. You feel like you really need to do something, to tell someone about this problem.

## Overworked

For several months, some people in your workgroup have been arriving late to work and have not been putting in very much effort while they are there. It wasn't any big deal at first, but lately you've been picking up the slack, staying late and working hard, while they share in the credit. You've tried joking around that you were doing all of the work, and you've tried to be more direct, but nothing seems to help. You feel like you really need to do something, to tell someone about this problem.

## Unethical behavior

Recently, you've noticed an employee in another department stealing money from the company. You are not sure how much money was stolen. The problem is that this employee is popular in the other department and you are not sure if there would be any negative consequences if you told someone. And you don't want to be labeled as a rat or tattle-tail. You feel like you really need to do something, to tell someone about this problem.

## Loss of benefits

Ever since you were hired, employees in your department agreed upon a weekly schedule for work. Anytime someone could not make a shift, someone else would be able to cover for that person. Recently, your organization made a policy that all schedules would now be made by management and switching shifts would need to be cleared with them as well. It doesn't seem like there is any reason for this new policy because everything was going smoothly before, and it really bothers you that

management would change something like this that had been around for so long. You feel like you really need to do something, to tell someone about this problem.

### **Supervisor Relational Descriptions**

#### **Low LMX**

You do not feel strongly connected to your supervisor. You take care of your job, and most communication from your supervisor involves the tasks of your job. You would probably never talk to this supervisor about anything that was not work-related. You do not feel like you have any closeness in your relationship with this supervisor.

#### **Medium LMX**

You have an adequate relationship with your supervisor. You talk from time to time with your supervisor and could trust this supervisor with most job related information. You might share more personal information from home from time to time. You are moderately committed to this supervisor.

#### **High LMX**

You have a close relationship with your supervisor, and the two of you talk often about almost any subject. You have a high level of trust with your supervisor, and you feel like your relationship has a high degree of connection. Overall, you are very committed to this supervisor, and the two of you try to provide emotional support for each other.

### **Coworker Relational Descriptions**

#### **Informational Peer**

You are comfortable sharing job-related information with this coworker, and you know that if you had a question about how to do your job, your coworker would help. But you are unlikely to ever depend on a connection with this coworker for anything beyond basic job information.

#### **Collegial Peer**

You have developed a good relationship with this coworker as you often share dreams and strategies for your career with each other. When you need specific feedback regarding your job performance, this coworker would be someone you seek to provide that feedback, *but you do not depend on this person for emotional support*. All in all, you could consider this coworker a friend.

#### **Special Peer**

You have a very close relationship with this person. You may share personal information and seek advice from this coworker regarding situations in your personal life outside of the workplace. Your relationship has developed to the point where you would seek emotional support from this coworker for problems you encounter, whether or not they are work related. This coworker is a close friend.

## APPENDIX C

## PILOT TEST, FORM 1

**Instructions.**

**Read each scenarios below and answer the questions that follow.**

1. Ever since you were hired, employees in your department agreed upon a weekly schedule for work. Anytime someone could not make a shift, someone else would be able to cover for that person. Recently, your organization made a policy that all schedules would now be made by management and switching shifts would need to be cleared with them as well. It doesn't seem like there is any reason for this new policy because everything was going smoothly before, and it really bothers you that management would change something like this that had been around for so long. You feel like you really need to do something, to tell someone about this problem.

a. Is this scenario a realistic description?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

b. How likely is it that something like this may happen?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

c. Could you could imagine something like this occurring to you?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

d. Is it realistic to talk to a supervisor about this situation?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

e. Is it realistic to talk to a coworker about this situation?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

f. Would you feel comfortable talking to your supervisor about this situation?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

g. Would you feel comfortable talking to a coworker about this situation?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5



2. Someone in the department where you work has just been promoted ahead of everyone else. You believe that this person does not deserve this promotion because this employee is always late, rarely puts 100% into work, and often takes credit for the effort of others. You feel like you really need to do something, to tell someone about this problem.

a. Is this scenario a realistic description?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

b. How likely is it that something like this may happen?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

c. Could you could imagine something like this occurring to you?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

d. Is it realistic to talk to a supervisor about this situation?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

e. Is it realistic to talk to a coworker about this situation?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

f. Would you feel comfortable talking to your supervisor about this situation?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

g. Would you feel comfortable talking to a coworker about this situation?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

3. For several months, you have been getting the feeling that your ideas are not being considered. When you and your coworkers present ideas to your boss, your ideas are never even considered in the final decision. You have just as much education as your coworkers, but you feel like you are being overlooked, and this could be damaging to your career. You feel like you really need to do something, to tell someone about this problem.

a. Is this scenario a realistic description?

Absolutely no

1

2

3

4

Absolutely yes

5

b. How likely is it that something like this may happen?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

c. Could you could imagine something like this occurring to you?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

d. Is it realistic to talk to a supervisor about this situation?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

e. Is it realistic to talk to a coworker about this situation?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

f. Would you feel comfortable talking to your supervisor about this situation?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

g. Would you feel comfortable talking to a coworker about this situation?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

4. For several months, some people in your workgroup have been arriving late to work and have not been putting in very much effort while they are there. It wasn't any big deal at first, but lately you've been picking up the slack, staying late and working hard, while they share in the credit. You've tried joking around that you were doing all of the work, and you've tried to be more direct, but nothing seems to help. You feel like you really need to do something, to tell someone about this problem, and you decide to speak to your supervisor.

You have an adequate relationship with your supervisor. You talk from time to time with your supervisor and could trust this supervisor with most job related information. You might share more personal information from home from time to time. You are moderately committed to this supervisor.

a. Is this scenario a realistic description?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

b. How likely is it that something like this may happen?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

c. Could you could imagine something like this occurring to you?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

d. In general, is it realistic to talk to a supervisor about this situation?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

e. In general, is it realistic to talk to a coworker about this situation?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

f. In general, would you feel comfortable talking to your supervisor about this situation?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

g. In general, would you feel comfortable talking to a coworker about this situation?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

h. Based on the above description of your supervisor, how would you describe your relationship with this supervisor?

|              |   |   |   |            |
|--------------|---|---|---|------------|
| Very Distant |   |   |   | Very Close |
| 1            | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5          |

i. Based on the above description of your supervisor, how would you describe communication with your supervisor?

|                 |   |   |   |           |
|-----------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Very Restricted |   |   |   | Very Open |
| 1               | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

j. Based on the above description of your supervisor, how would you describe trust with your supervisor?

|                 |   |   |   |               |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---------------|
| Very untrusting |   |   |   | Very trusting |
| 1               | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5             |

5. Recently, you've noticed an employee in another department stealing money from the company. You are not sure how much money was stolen. The problem is that this employee is popular in the other department and you are not sure if there would be any negative consequences if you told someone. And you don't want to be labeled as a rat or tattle-tail. You feel like you really need to do something, to tell someone about this problem, so you decide to talk to a coworker.

You have a very close relationship with this person. You may share personal information and seek advice from this coworker regarding situations in your personal

life outside of the workplace. Your relationship has developed to the point where you would seek emotional support from this coworker for problems you encounter, whether or not they are work related. This coworker is a close friend.

a. Is this scenario a realistic description?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

b. How likely is it that something like this may happen?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

c. Could you could imagine something like this occurring to you?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

d. In general, is it realistic to talk to a supervisor about this situation?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

e. In general, is it realistic to talk to a coworker about this situation?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

f. In general, would you feel comfortable talking to your supervisor about this situation?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

g. In general, would you feel comfortable talking to a coworker about this situation?

|               |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Absolutely no |   |   |   | Absolutely yes |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

h. Based on the above description of your coworker, how would you describe your relationship with this coworker?

|              |   |   |   |            |
|--------------|---|---|---|------------|
| Very Distant |   |   |   | Very Close |
| 1            | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5          |

i. Based on the above description of your supervisor, how would you describe communication with your coworker?

|                 |   |   |   |           |
|-----------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Very Restricted |   |   |   | Very Open |
| 1               | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

j. Based on the above description of your supervisor, how would you describe trust with your coworker?

Very untrusting

1

2

3

4

Very trusting

5

**Thank you so much for your time and attention in completing this.**

## APPENDIX D

## MAIN INSTRUMENT, FORM 1

*Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this survey. As stated on the consent form, your answers will remain completely anonymous. The telephone number that you wrote on the consent form will be used to confirm that you completed this survey, but no information from this survey will ever be linked to your name or phone number.*

**The situation below describes a situation that might happen in a workplace. Please read the scenario below and answer the questions that follow.**

Someone in the department where you work has just been promoted ahead of everyone else. You believe that this person does not deserve this promotion because this employee is always late, rarely puts 100% into work, and often takes credit for the effort of others. You feel like you really need to do something, to tell someone about this problem, and you decide to speak to your supervisor.

You do not feel strongly connected to your supervisor. You take care of your job, and most communication from your supervisor involves the tasks of your job. You would probably never talk to this supervisor about anything that was not work-related. You do not feel like you have any closeness in your relationship with this supervisor.

**First, we'd like to think about how you would actually approach your supervisor in this situation. The first series of questions asks about what your goals and plans might be in such a situation, so think carefully about how you might respond to the described scenario.**

For questions 1-16, as you think about your goals and plans for this conversation with your supervisor/coworker, to what extent are you trying to:

- |   |            |   |   |   |           |
|---|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| 1. ...provide guidance to your supervisor/coworker? |            |   |   |   |           |
|   | Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
|   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| 2. ... solicit recommendations about what to do?    |            |   |   |   |           |
|   | Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
|   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| 3. ... get more information about the situation?    |            |   |   |   |           |
|   | Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
|   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| 4. ... change his/her opinion of the situation?     |            |   |   |   |           |
|   | Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
|   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

5. ... change the behavior of the supervisor or coworker to whom you are talking?  
 Not at All                      Very much  
 1                      2                      3                      4                      5
6. ... change the behavior of the person you think is causing the problem?  
 Not at All                      Very much  
 1                      2                      3                      4                      5
7. ... build support for your position?  
 Not at All                      Very much  
 1                      2                      3                      4                      5
8. ... express your emotions to your supervisor/coworker?  
 Not at All                      Very much  
 1                      2                      3                      4                      5
9. ... change your supervisor's/coworker's mind?  
 Not at All                      Very much  
 1                      2                      3                      4                      5
10. ... to gain facts about the situation?  
 Not at All                      Very much  
 1                      2                      3                      4                      5
11. ... to receive some direction about what you need to do next?  
 Not at All                      Very much  
 1                      2                      3                      4                      5
12. ... to give direction to your supervisor?  
 Not at All                      Very much  
 1                      2                      3                      4                      5
13. ... "clear the air" regarding this situation.  
 Not at All                      Very much  
 1                      2                      3                      4                      5
14. ... receive assistance from your supervisor/coworker?  
 Not at All                      Very much  
 1                      2                      3                      4                      5
15. ... receive your supervisor's/coworker's advice?  
 Not at All                      Very much  
 1                      2                      3                      4                      5

16. ... "get this off your chest"?

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

17. This situation's potential for making me nervous and uncomfortable would worry me.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

18. In this situation, I would be careful to avoid saying things which were socially inappropriate.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

19. Getting what I want in this situation would be more important to me than preserving the relationship with my supervisor/coworker.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

20. In this situation, I would not be concerned with sticking to my own standards.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

21. In this situation, I would be very concerned about behaving in a mature, responsible manner.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

22. In this situation, I would be concerned with not violating my own ethical standards.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

23. The person to whom I am talking could make things very bad for me if I kept on bugging him/her.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

24. In this situation, I would be concerned about being true to myself and my values.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

25. I would be worried about a threat to my safety if I pushed the issue in this situation.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |



26. This situation is *not* the type of interaction that makes me nervous.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

27. I would be concerned with making (or maintaining) a good impression when I talk with my supervisor/coworker.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

28. My supervisor/coworker might take advantage of me if I tried too hard to convince him/her.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

29. I would be very conscious of what was appropriate and inappropriate in this situation.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

30. I would be concerned with putting myself in a “bad light” in this situation.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

31. In talking to my supervisor/coworker, I would avoid saying things which might make me apprehensive or nervous.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

32. In this situation, I would not be willing to risk possible damage to the relationship in order to get what I wanted.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

33. In this situation, I would be afraid of being uncomfortable or nervous.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

34. I wouldn't really care if I made my supervisor/coworker mad or not in this situation.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

35. I wouldn't want to look stupid while trying to persuade my supervisor/coworker.

|            |   |   |   |           |
|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Not at All |   |   |   | Very much |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

36. In this situation, I would be concerned about maintaining my own ethical standards.

Not at All

Very much

1

2

3

4

5

Now, think specifically about what you would say to your supervisor. Write the message you would want to communicate to your supervisor in the space below.

Now, we'd like to ask a few questions about your perceptions of this scenario.

37. Is this scenario a realistic description?

Absolutely no

Absolutely yes

1

2

3

4

5

38. How likely is it that something like this would actually happen in the workplace?

Absolutely no

Absolutely yes

1

2

3

4

5

39. Could you could imagine something like this happening to you?

Absolutely no

Absolutely yes

1

2

3

4

5

40. Based on the description of your supervisor, how would you describe your relationship with this supervisor/coworker?

Very Distant

Very Close

1

2

3

4

5

41. Based on the description of your supervisor, how would you describe communication with your supervisor/coworker?

Very Restricted

Very Open

1 2 3 4 5

42. Based on the description of your supervisor, how would you describe trust with your supervisor/coworker?

Very untrusting

Very trusting

1 2 3 4 5

Finally, a few questions about yourself.

Are you \_\_\_\_\_male or \_\_\_\_\_female?

What is your age?

How long have you worked in your current job? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you worked in your current organization?

What is the nature of your job?

What is your highest educational level?

\_\_\_\_\_ Didn't finish high school

\_\_\_\_\_ High school diploma

\_\_\_\_\_ Some college

\_\_\_\_\_ Associate's degree

\_\_\_\_\_ Bachelor's degree

\_\_\_\_\_ Master's degree or higher

If this situation happened in **your** workplace, how open do you think your supervisors would be to listening to you?

Not Open

Very Open

1 2 3 4 5

Under the conditions described above, how likely do you think it is that you would talk to someone at work about it?

Not likely

Very likely

1 2 3 4 5

How likely would you be to talk with a supervisor?

Not likely

Very likely

1 2 3 4 5

How likely would you be to talk with a coworker?

Not likely

1

2

3

4

Very likely

5

**Thank you so much for your time and attention in completing this survey. Please  
return it to the student who gave it to you.**

## VITA

Johnny Thomas Garner  
johnnygarner@tamu.edu

Department of Communication  
TAMU 4234  
College Station, TX 77843

**Education**

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Ph.D. (May, 2006)

Texas A & M University

Communication (Emphasis on organizational communication)

Dissertation: When Things Go Wrong at Work: Expressions of Organizational  
Dissent as Interpersonal Influence. Chair: Katherine I. Miller

M.A. (2001)

Abilene Christian University

Human Communication (Emphasis on organizational communication and conflict  
management)

Thesis: A Transperceptional Analysis of Leadership within University Residence Halls.  
Chair: Carley Dodd

B.A. (1999) *Magna Cum Laude*

Abilene Christian University

Theatre and Youth/Family Ministry

**Selected Publications and Convention Papers**

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Garner, J. T. (in press) Masters of the universe? Resource Dependency and  
Interorganizational Power Relationships at NASA. *Journal of Applied  
Communication Research*.

Garner, J. T. (in press). It's not what you know: A transactive memory analysis of  
knowledge networks at NASA. *Journal of Technical Writing and  
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Poole, M. S. and Garner, J. T. (2006). Perspectives on workgroup conflict and  
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as interaction between a leader and a foil." Presented at the National  
Communication Association Conference, Chicago, IL. Top 3 paper, Group  
Communication Division.